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PHYLLIS.

A NOVEL.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "MOLLY BAWN."

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1883.

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PHYLLIS.

CHAPTER I.

We are all more or less late for breakfast next morning, Mr. Thornton being the only one who exhibits much symptoms of life. He is if possible a degree gayer, more sprightly than usual, and talks incessantly to anyone who will be kind enough to listen to him.

"I do think a ball in a country house the most using-up thing I know," he says, helping himself generously to cold game-pie. "It is twice the fun of a town affair, but it knocks one up—no doubt of it—makes a fellow feel so seedy and languid, and ruins the appetite."

"I think you will do uncommonly well if you finish what you have there," remarks Sir Mark, languidly.

Thornton roars—so does Billy.

"You have me there," says Chips. "I ought to

have known better than to introduce *that* subject. My appetite is my weak point."

"Your strong point, I suppose you mean," puts in Sir Mark, faintly amused.

"I think the worst thing about a country ball is this," says Bébé: "one feels so lonely, so purposeless when it is over. In town one will probably be going to another next evening—*here* one can do nothing but regret past glories. I wish it were all going to happen over again to-night."

"So do I," says Thornton, casting a sentimental glance at the speaker. "I would go over every hour of it again gladly—old maids and all—for the sake of the few minutes of real happiness I enjoyed. There are *some* people one could dance with *for ever*."

Lord Chandos, raising his head, bestows a haughty stare upon the youthful Chips, which is quite thrown away, as that gay young Don is staring in turn, with all his might and with the liveliest admiration, at Miss Beatoun.

"Could you?" asks that fascinating person innocently. "Now, I could not; at least I think I would like to sit down now and then. But, Phyllis, dear, seriously, I wish we were going to do something out of the common this evening."

"Try charades or tableaux," suggests Marmaduke, brilliantly.

"The very thing! Tableaux let it be by all

means. Marmaduke, no one can say last night's dissipation has clouded your intellect. We will have them in the library, where the folding-doors will come in capitally."

"You used to be a great man at tableaux, Carrington," says Sir George; "and I shall never forget seeing Lady Blanche once as Guinevere."

Her ladyship raises her white lids and smiles faintly.

"You were Lancelot, Gore, on that occasion," continues this well-meaning but blundering young man. "You remember, eh?"

"Distinctly—quite as if it happened yesterday," replies Sir Mark, with a studied indifference little suited to the emphatic words. "Have some of this hot cake, Thornton? You are eating nothing."

"Thanks; I don't know but I will," says Chips, totally unabashed. "You could hardly give me anything I like so well as hot cake for breakfast."

"You will make a point of remembering that, I trust, Mrs. Carrington," says Sir Mark, gravely.

"Phyllis, you would look such a good Desdemona," says Bébé, who is now fairly started. "I am sure she must have been *very* young to let herself be beguiled into a marriage with that horrid Othello."

"And who would represent the Moor?"

"Sir Mark, I suppose; he looks more like it than anyone else."

"You flatter me, Miss Beatoun," murmurs Sir Mark, with a slight bow.

"Oh, I only mean you are darker than any of the others, except James, and I am sure *he* never could look sufficiently ferocious," answers Bébé, laughing.

"And you think I can?"

"You will have to. When we have blackened you a little and bent your eyebrows into a murderous scowl, and made you look thoroughly odious, you will do very well."

"How one *does* enjoy the prospect of tableaux! I rather think I shall rival Salvini by the time I am out of your hands."

"I hope not. I can't bear Salvini," says Harriet, mildly.

"That is going rather far, Harry. Why don't you say you can't bear his figure? We *might* believe that."

"But I don't want to be smothered," I protest, nervously.

"Oh, you *must* submit to that. When people hear of 'a scene from Othello' they immediately think of pillows. They would consider they had been done out of something if we gave them a mere court part. We will have you just dying, murmuring your last poor little words, with Sir Mark looking as if he were longing to try the effect of the

bolster next; and Miss Vernon, as Emilia, kneeling beside you."

"Now, that is what I call a downright cheerful picture," says Marmaduke.

"*I* call it high tragedy," replies Miss Beatoun, reprovingly. "*Will* you be Emilia, Miss Vernon?"

"I will help you in any way I can," says Dora, with her usual gentle amiability.

"You would make a capital Beatrice, Bébé," says Marmaduke. "We might have a good scene from 'Much Ado about Nothing.' Who will be Benedick? Now, don't all speak at once."

"I think it would suit me," says Chips, very modestly.

We all laugh heartily.

"You grow modest, Mr. Thornton," says Sir Mark. "I fear you must be ill. Try a little of this honey; you will find it excellent."

"No, thanks. I feel I shall be able to pull through now until luncheon."

"Let us go into the library and arrange everything," I suggest, eagerly; and we all rise and go there.

By degrees, as the afternoon advances, the men show symptoms of fatigue and drop off one by one, while we women still keep together to discuss the all-engrossing idea.

Curious odds and ends of old-world finery are dragged from remote closets and brought to light.

Clothes that once adorned Marmaduke's ancestors are now draped round young white arms and necks, and draw forth peals of laughter from the lookers-on.

"But we must have an audience," suggests Bébé at length, rather blankly, stopping short, with her hands in the air, from which hangs down an ancient embroidered robe.

"True. How shall we manage that?"

"Send a groom instantly with invitations to the Hastings, the Leslies, and the De Veres and the Cuppaidges. I am positive they are all dying of *ennui* this moment, and will hail with rapture any chance of escape from it. They will all come; and the Leslies have two or three really very presentable young men staying with them."

"Yes, that will be best. Dora, will you go and write the notes for me? Now, would it not be a good thing to exclude all the non-players from our council?"

"Oh," says Harriet, "then *I* must go."

"No, no, Harry, we can't do without you," cry I, imploringly; "*you* must stay. We could not get on without some head to guide us and soothe down disappointed actors. You shall be wardrobe-woman and chief secretary and prime minister and stage manager all in one."

"Yes," says Bébé, who has got herself into the ancient robe by this, "and head-centre and peace-maker, and all that sort of thing. Now, don't I

look sweet in this flowered gown? Ah! what interesting creatures our great-great-grandmothers must have been! It almost makes me long to be a great-great-grandmother myself."

"But your salary — your salary; state your terms," says Harriet. "I cannot be all that you have mentioned for nothing."

"For love, dearest—call you *that* nothing?" replies Bébé, as she struts up and down before a long glass.

Presently darling mother, who has slept at Strangemore and breakfasted in her room, comes creeping in, and a dispute arises as to whether she must be excluded from the Cabinet and sent into exile until night reveals our secrets. But she is so amused at everything, and has grown so young and gay in the absence of her bugbear, that we make an exception in her favour also; and as she has a real talent for dressing people, and would have made an invaluable ladies' maid, had her lot been cast so low, we find her very useful later on.

The invitations are despatched, and acceptances from all brought back: everyone, it appears, will be delighted to come and witness our success or failure, as the case may be. These polite replies cause us faint pangs of consternation largely tinctured with timidity, making us conscious that we are regularly in for something; that much is expected of us; and

that after all the performance may prove "flat, stale, and unprofitable."

All through dinner we—the intended victims—are mysterious, not to say depressed; while Sir James Handcock, the two men from the Barracks, and Sir George Ashurst make mild jokes at our expense and wish us safely out of it.

At nine the guests arrive; at half-past all is in readiness; the audience is seated, the impromptu curtains are drawn up, and "Rebecca laying the jewels at Rowena's feet" stands revealed.

Lady Blanche Going, as the Jewess, is looking positively beautiful, as, kneeling at Dora's feet, in many-coloured garments of crimson-and-gold and such gorgeous shades, with much gleaming of precious stones, she gazes with saddened curiosity into the face above her; while Dora, raising her veil—my wedding veil—with uplifted arms to look down on her, presents such a contrast, with her dead-white robe and fair babyish face, to the darker beauty's more glowing style as takes the audience by storm.

The applause is loud and lengthened; and Sir George Ashurst's enthusiasm reaches such a pitch that when it subsides he has to retire to his room in search of another pair of gloves.

The curtain rises for the second time on Lady Blanche again and Sir Mark Gore, as "The Hugue-

nots." This, too, is highly successful, albeit her ladyship is too dark for the part.

Everybody agrees that Mark, with the sorrowfully determined expression on his face, is perfect; while Lady Blanche astonishes some of us by the amount of passionate pleading she throws into her eyes.

And now comes a hitch. The third tableau on which we have decided is "The Last Appeal." There has been considerable difficulty about the arrangement of this from the beginning, and now at the last moment Sir Mark Gore vows he will have nothing to do with it.

"I couldn't do it," he says, throwing out his hands. "There is no use in urging a fellow. I *could* look murderous, I *might* look sentimental—I could *not* appeal. I won't, and that's all about it. They will say there are no more actors if you send me on again so soon; and besides, those breeches don't fit me. They will go on Chandos—let him take my part."

"How disobliging you are!" says Miss Beatoun, flushing. "Then I won't be the person appealed to. I did not want to all along. It is too bad I should get no parts but these in which rags and ugly dresses are worn. I shall have to do Cinderella presently in tatters, and in this I have only a short gown and nasty thick shoes, and a pitcher."

"What nonsense!" say I. "You know everyone

said you looked delicious with that little handkerchief across your shoulders. Lord Chandos, go and dress yourself directly, as Sir Mark will not."

"Of what use is it," says Chandos, quietly, "if Miss Beatoun declines to act with me?"

"Acting with you has nothing to do with it," returns Bébé, reddening perceptibly. "I only decline the 'old clo'' part of it. Consider how it hurts my vanity."

"Yet you would have worn them had Sir Mark kept his word," I say, in an injured tone.

At this Lord Chandos looks expressively at Miss Beatoun—Miss Beatoun looks witheringly at me; and Marmaduke, utterly innocent, says, persuasively—

"Come, now, Bébé, that's conclusive. Chandos will think you have some reason for it if you persist in refusing."

At this unfortunate remark even I feel some dismay. Considering all that has passed between these two, and the nature of the tableau in question, it *is* unfortunate. Chandos and Bébé colour violently; the latter's fingers close with nervous force upon the pretty short gown she is wearing and crumple it recklessly. The loose cambric kerchief on her breast rises and falls with angry emotion. Chandos is evidently furious.

"I shall think nothing of the kind," he says, in

a low distinct tone. "Miss Beatoun should be allowed to please herself. For my part I think it an odious scene, and hackneyed to the last degree."

"Still, as it is on the cards——" I murmur, weakly.

Marmaduke stares at me in wonderment, and then at Harriet, who is also listening. We are every one of us thoroughly unpleasant.

Bébé laughs a rather forced laugh. "I wonder what our friends in the dress circle are thinking all this time?" she says. "Lord Chandos, go and put on your things, and don't let us keep them waiting any longer."

"That's right," exclaims Marmaduke, much relieved, moving away to another group in the distance engaged in a hot dispute. Still Chandos lingers.

"I am sorry for this," he says to Bébé, in a low tone, almost haughtily. "But it is not yet too late. If the idea is so detestable to you, then give it up now, and I will support you."

"Why should it be distasteful to me?" very coldly. "I will make no further objections."

"I hope you exonerate me. I could not help it. I am more vexed about it than you can be."

"I think you might have said emphatically just at first you did not wish it. However, it does not matter."

"How could I? Such a remark would have been an implied rudeness to you."

"Then I wish you had been rude."

"You are unreasonable, Miss Beatoun," says his lordship, stiffly. Then, in a still lower tone: "There are few things I would not do for you, but that is not one of them."

"I think you had better go and put on those garments Sir Marmaduke rejected. We can finish the argument later on," murmurs Bébé, turning away, with a half-smile; and Lord Chandos hurrying over his toilette, we have them on our miniature stage sooner than we dared to hope.

But though they gave in to their own wishes, or rather to their own pride, the performance is a failure; for, though Bébé certainly manages to look the very personification of hardened persistency, Lord Chandos by no means comes up to our idea of the appealing and despairing adorer, and altogether there is a stony finish about it that nobody admires. The spectators are, indeed, polite and say all manner of pretty things; but they say them from the lips alone, which is palpable and not satisfactory.

And now comes my turn. The "British public," as Mr. Thornton insists on calling our very select audience, is requested to turn its kind attention on Tennyson's "Sleeping Princess," wrapt in mystic slumber. *I* am the Sleeping Princess, it having struck me in the early part of the day that this

rôle, requiring little beyond extreme inaction, would exactly suit me, and cause me less trepidation.

Upon a crimson lounger, clad all in white, I lie, my long fair brown hair scattered across the cushions and falling to the ground beside me. One hand is thrown above my head, the other hangs listlessly, sleepily downwards; a deep-red rose has dropped from it, and now blushes, half-lost, amidst the tresses on the floor.

Sir Mark, in the character of the Prince, leans over me, as though in the act of giving the caress that brings me back from Dreamland. His face, I know, is near—so near that, between nervousness and shrinking, I feel a mad desire to break into forbidden laughter; so much so that when the curtain falls I am more than thankful.

Slowly it descends, and as I hear it touch the stage I cautiously open my eyes—to find Sir Mark has not yet raised himself from his stooping posture.

My eyes look straight into his. There are literally only a few inches between his face and mine, and I fancy I can discern a treacherous gleam in them. Something masterful, too, in his expression, as though he would say, "I could an' I would," strikes me. Instantly I resent it, and, springing to my feet, stand back from him, crimson with indignation and some undefined fear.

There is no time for words, had I even the desire to speak, which I have not, as at this moment

Lady Blanche Going and Marmaduke come from behind the scenes to congratulate us. I try to recover myself hurriedly, but it is too late; my red cheeks and frightened, half-shamed eyes attract their notice; and Marmaduke, glancing from me to Sir Mark, regards us earnestly, colouring very slowly himself the while.

"Oh!" exclaims her ladyship, starting, and assuming an air of surprise; then, with an affected laugh: "How foolish of me! But really for the moment, on account of your attitudes and stillness, I fancied I had come on too soon, and that you were still acting."

"How completely you must have forgotten the subject of the late tableau!" replies Sir Mark, in a very calm tone, fixing her with his wonderful keen dark eyes.

Some instinct of evil makes me go and stand close to Marmaduke.

"Was it a success?" I ask, nervously.

"Without doubt," says 'Duke, rousing himself. "You look fatigued, Phyllis; come and have some wine."

I take his arm and go with him gladly.

"Did anything vex you, darling?" he asks me quietly as we go into the next room.

"No: it was imagination. I did not know his face was quite so close, and, in consequence, when I opened my eyes I got a start. It was ridiculous of me."

"Was that all?"

"Yes, that was all." I laugh, though in a rather spiritless way, and feel angry with myself for the vague restraint that is quite discernible in my manner, while Marmaduke pours me out some claret-cup, without asking any more questions.

"'Duke—Marmaduke—where *are* you? Oh, come, come," cries Bébé looking in, "we are all waiting for you. How can I pose properly until you get me the slipper? You said you had it somewhere."

So 'Duke flies, and I, putting from me my small vexation, which even already appears half-fanciful, follow him to the sides, to see how they look before the curtain rises.

Cinderella (Bébé), clad in picturesque rags, is represented in the act of flying, leaving behind her the magical slipper, which Master Chips is eagerly stooping to pick up. He makes a veritable "Prince Charming," in his scarlet cloak and long silk stockings—got no one knows how—and cap and feathers; while Bébé, glancing backwards in her flight to mark the fate of her shoe, casts upon him a bewitching languishing gaze that (supposing the original Cinderella to be capable of such another) must have had more to do with her being Princess later on than anything in the shape of a vow.

Then we close up Dora, as Constance de Beverley, into an imaginary wall—the poor nun, with raised despairing eyes and downward clasped hands,

creating much sympathy. Yet none of us feel sure this was the spirit in which the real Constance met her doom; only, as the devotional tearful style suits Dora, we conclude it was, and make no unwelcome enquiries; and everyone is charmed.

After this comes "Queen Eleanor presenting the agreeable choice of the poisoned bowl or the dagger to the fair but frail Rosamond," represented by Blanche Going and myself; at the conclusion of which Bébé draws me aside to whisper, laughingly, how Blanche had looked the part *con amore*.

"I would have given very little for your chance of life had there been any reality about it," she says. "She looked—oh! she looked as if——" with a vicious clenching of her small fist, full of meaning.

Bébé, as a laughing saucy Beatrice, and Lord Chandos as Benedick, make a much happier tableau than their last, and eventually we wind up with a scene from the "Queen's Maries" of Whyte Melville, in which everybody generally is brought in, and where Blanche Going, as Marie Stuart, in black velvet and the inevitable cap, is the principal feature; though Bébé makes a very charming Seton, and even I feel some admiration on beholding Marmaduke as Darnley.

With a sense of relief we come down from the stage and mingle with our audience, accepting mo-

destly the compliments showered upon us from all sides.

Mother, who has not been inside a theatre since she was nineteen, comes up to tell us it was the prettiest sight she ever saw, and to compare us favourably with all the celebrated actors and actresses of her time.

Presently we leave the scene of our triumphs and wander into the great cool ballroom, where the decorations of the foregoing evening are still to be seen. Then somebody orders in a piano, and somebody else sits down and begins to play on it, and in another minute or two we are all dancing.

"I don't believe poor Mary Hamilton ever had your laughing eyes," says Sir Mark to me, during a pause in the dance. "She must have been a sadder, more sedate sort of person altogether. See how differently love works in different people."

"You forget she was unhappy in hers. Besides" —saucily—"how do you know love has anything to do with *my* eyes?"

"I don't know, of course; am only supposing——"

"Never suppose. It is foolish, and—fatiguing. Though, now we are on the subject, Monsieur Chastelard, you shall give me your definition of the words 'to love.' If we may accept Whyte Melville's opinion of you, you must be a very competent judge."

"I have no theory of my own; I am a sceptic on that point. I will give you the orthodox definition if you wish, which everybody—in a novel—is bound to accept. It means, I fancy, to merge your own existence so entirely in that of another as to obliterate oneself and live only for him or her, as the case may be. Also, it would be strictly necessary to feel lost and miserable in the absence of the beloved one. You may call *that* fatiguing if you please. Do you like the picture? Horrible, isn't it?"

"Not only horrible but impracticable, I should say. I might manage to be supremely happy in the presence of the adored; I do *not* think I could be 'miserable' exactly in his absence." Then, laughing: "Is that really 'pure love?' If so, I am a sceptic too. It would be absurdly weak-minded, and would confine one's happiness to too little a world, to indulge in such a belief. It must be wiser to take enjoyment as it comes in every way, and not be so hopelessly dependent upon one."

"I entirely agree with you. Indeed, I fancy most people would agree with you," replies Sir Mark, carelessly, looking straight before him, with so much meaning in his gaze that instinctively I follow it, until my eyes fall upon Lady Blanche Going, at the other end of the room.

Evidently tired and flushed from dancing, she has sunk with lazy grace into a low chair, and now, half-turning, is laughing up into Marmaduke's face,

as he leans solicitously over her. Even as I look she raises her hand to repossess herself of the bouquet he holds, and to my impatience it seems that an unnecessarily long time elapses before the flowers go from his hand to hers.

My late careless frivolous words appear to mock me. Why does he look at her like that? Why is he always by her side? Are there no other women in the room?

I try to think of something gay and heartless to say to Sir Mark, but just at the moment nothing will come to me.

Again the vague jealousy of the evening before returns in twofold force, and I bring my teeth rather tightly together. After all Marmaduke said to me on the balcony last night about making myself conspicuous with one, it is, to say the least of it, rather inconsistent with his own behaviour now.

What a perpetual simper that woman keeps up, merely to show the whiteness of her teeth! How pleased 'Duke appears to be with her inane conversation! Now, if I had ever loved him this probably would have vexed me; as it is——

Bah! I *will* think of something else.

I turn to Sir Mark, with a very successful little laugh.

"A living illustration of my text," I say, bending my head in my husband's direction.

"Where? Oh! there." He stares at Lady Blanche

reflectively for a minute or so, and then says, "She is certainly good-looking."

"'Good-looking!' How very faint! Surely she is handsome. Are you one of those who consider it impolitic to admire one woman to another?"

"As a rule I believe it to be a mistake," replies he, coolly; "but in this case I had no thought of policy. I am never quite sure that I do think her ladyship handsome. That she is generally thought so I admit. Marmaduke and she were always good friends."

"So I should say."

"At one time we imagined a *tendresse* there, and dreamed of a marriage, but, you see, 'Duke was bent on doing more wisely."

"Thanks. That is prettily put. Was the *tendresse* you speak of on her side or his?"

"A mutual business, I fancy, if it existed at all. But, as we made a mistake in the principal part of it, we probably did so in all. Besides"—lightly—"I ought not to tell *you* all this, Mrs. Carrington. Tales out of school are malicious. Such mere suppositions as they are, too."

"Why? Surely I may congratulate myself on having gained a victory over so much beauty? It would be a pity to deny me this little gratification."

Nevertheless at heart I *am* sorely vexed, and, through pique and wounded feeling, make myself more than agreeable to Sir Mark for the evening.

Not once does 'Duke come near me; nor does he even appear to notice my wilful flirtation.

Just before we break up, indeed, finding myself near to him in the supper-room, a strange desire to test his real mind towards me, to compel him to pay me some attention, seizes me. He is as usual in close attendance on Blanche Going, who has kept him chained to her side—willingly chained, without doubt, during greater part of the evening. Having dismissed my partner on some pretext, I look straight at Marmaduke, and, shivering slightly, say, "How cold it is!"

"Cold?" replies he, *nonchalantly*. "Is it? I thought it warm. Better send some one for a shawl. Here, Gore, will you get Mrs. Carrington something warm to put round her? She finds a draught somewhere."

And as Sir Mark departs obedient 'Duke turns once more to his companion, as though forgetful of my very existence. Lady Blanche smiles disagreeably.

Yesterday—surely only yesterday, he would have been kinder—he would have gone for this shawl himself. How eagerly, with what extreme tenderness has he ever anticipated my wants! And now the attentions of a stranger are considered good enough for me. Is he tired of me already? Has he so soon discovered the poverty of my charms? Or has that old fascination returned with redoubled

power, to make him regret what is, alas! irrevocable?

Sick at heart, and mortified to the last degree, I turn away, yet with lifted head and proud disdainful lips, lest he or she should rightly guess my thoughts.

. . . . .

All the next day a marked coldness exists between me and my husband. We mutually avoid each other, and, the better to do so, fall back for conversation upon those nearest to us. The nearest to me, at all times, is Sir Mark Gore.

Not being by any means a "gushing" pair, this temporary estrangement, is unnoticed by the greater part of our guests; to the few, however, it is plainly visible. Bébé sees it, and is vexed and troubled. Sir Mark sees it, and is curious. Lady Blanche sees it, and is triumphant. It is clear that, for whatever end she has in view, all things are working well. Once or twice during the evening I catch her eyes fixed upon me, and as I do so her glance falls slowly, while a malignant insolent smile creeps round her mouth. At such moments I am pagan in my sentiments, and would, if it were possible, call down all evil things upon my enemy.

Next day, however, the clouds partially disperse. Naturally forgiving, I find a difficulty in retaining wrath for any lengthened period and Marmaduke appears only too glad to meet my advances.

The third day, indeed, all seems forgotten—our animosity is laid—and peace is proclaimed. This time, however, there has been no explanation, no kindly reconciliation, and only Marmaduke and I know that underneath our perfect amiability lies a thin stratum of ice, that any chance cold may harden into hopeless solidity.

. . . . .

"Phyllis, we have agreed to let the birds hold high holiday to-morrow, if you will promise us a picnic. It seems a pity to let this last glimpse of summer go by unmarked," says Marmaduke, speaking to me from the foot of the dinner-table.

"Oh, how delightful!" cry I, flushing with pleasure, and dodging all the flowers on the table to get a good look at his face. As he is also carefully dodging them in his turn, with the like laudable purpose of beholding me, it is some time before we manage it. When our eyes do meet we smile sympathetically.

I hardly know why I do so, but as I withdraw my gaze from Marmaduke I turn it upon Sir Mark Gore, who sits at my right hand. The curiously cold calculating expression I meet startles and somewhat displeases me.

"Do you not like picnics?" I ask him, abruptly.

"Very much indeed. Why should you think otherwise?"

"Your expression just now was not one of pleasure."

"No? It ought to have been. I was inwardly admiring the charming enthusiasm with which you received your husband's proposition."

"Oh!" return I, curtly. "Yes. As I told you once before, when I am pleased I show it; and I am more than pleased now—I am enchanted." Smiling brightly again at the thought. "Do you know I have not been at a picnic since I was a girl—that is, unmarried?"

"Not since *then*? Why, you must almost forget what a picnic means. Shall I refresh your memory? It means salted pies—and sugared fowl—and indescribable jellies and warm fluids—and your knees in your mouth—and flies. I don't myself know anything more enjoyable than a picnic."

"Dear me, how I pity you! Whose picnics have you been at, may I ask?" enquire I, with scorn. "To-morrow, I promise you, you shall see a very different specimen."

To-morrow comes to us as fine as though bespoken. Lady Blanche, walking into the breakfast-room in the charmingest of morning robes, addresses herself to my husband.

"Well, most noble, what are your plans for to-day?" she asks, with a pretty show of animation.

Though I am in the room, and she knows it, she takes no notice of me whatever—does not even

trouble herself so far as to bestow upon me the courtesy of a "Good-morning." She looks up at Marmaduke and smiles at him, and awaits his answer, as though he alone were to be consulted. Evidently in her opinion the mistress of the house is of no importance—a mere nonentity, in fact—the master is everything.

It occurs to me that she might be even gracious enough to smile in my direction, but she confines her attentions entirely to Marmaduke.

Has anyone else in the room noticed her insolence? There is rather a hush, I fancy, as I move composedly to my seat and alter the cups and saucers into more regular rows. I wonder curiously whether Marmaduke has remarked her breach of etiquette. Not he! What man ever saw anything wrong where a pretty woman is the transgressor, more especially when that pretty woman's blandishments are directed towards him? He gives back her smile placidly, and then speaks.

"I believe we have decided on a picnic."

"The picnic, of course. But *where*? That is the question."

"Anywhere you like—I am yours to command."

"You really mean it? Then I should like to go right through the country to St. Siebird's well. It is years since last I was there." She breathes a soft sigh, as though recalling some tender memory connected with her former visit.

"To the Wishing Well?" says 'Duke. "That is a long drive. The day is fine, however, and I see nothing to prevent our doing it. Can we manage it, do you think, Phyllis?"

"I see no obstacle in the way," I answer, indifferently, without raising my eyes.

"Then we may consider it a settled plan—may we, Mrs. Carrington?" says Lady Blanche, sweetly.

This time I do lift my head, and turn my eyes slowly upon her ladyship's.

"Good morning, Lady Blanche," I say, quietly, with the utmost composure. In spite of herself she is disconcerted.

"Oh, good morning," she says. "I quite fancied I had seen you somewhere before this morning."

"Did you? You take coffee, I think, Sir George? Dora, give Sir George some coffee."

"I think I deserve a vote of thanks for my suggestion," says Blanche, recovering. "I feel in great spirits myself already. The drive will do us good, and make us all as fresh as possible."

"True," says Marmaduke; "we have not had a drive for some time. A picnic near home is, I believe, a mistake. It is a capital idea, Phyllis, is it not?"

He addresses himself to me in a rather anxious, not to say conciliatory tone—for the first time he becomes aware of my unusual silence.

"Excellent. Though for my part I hardly re-

quire a drive as a tonic. I am always as fresh as I can be." (I cannot resist this one little thrust.) "Mr. Thornton"—to Chips, who has just entered—"come and sit here by me—there is more room."

For the first time in my life I feel my youth an advantage as I watch the faint colour rise to her ladyship's cheeks. Her mouth changes its expression. It is no longer complacent. At this moment I feel she hates me with a bitter hatred, and am partly comforted.

A brief smile quivers beneath Sir Mark's moustache; it is scarcely there when it is gone again, and he drops his eyes discreetly on his plate.

"How shall we go?" asks 'Duke. "We have the coach and your trap, Ashurst, and the open carriage—will that be enough? Harriet, what will suit you?"

"I shall stay at home, thank you," says Harriet, smiling. "I know I am letting myself down in your estimation horribly; but I confess I detest long drives. I believe I detest anything lengthened. I am naturally fickle." (She is the most sincere creature alive.) "I shall enjoy lounging about at home, looking at the flowers and reading, and that."

"Indeed, Harriet, you shall not," cry I, impetuously. "We would all be miserable without you."

"That's a fact, Lady Handcock," puts in Chips, heartily.

"Chippendale, you almost make me relent," says Harriet, smiling. "But"—in a piteous aside to me —"do not compel me to go. It is twelve miles there, and twelve miles back, if it is a yard—just think of that! My poor back would not stand it. James shall go and represent me."

"Why not change the place, and name a spot nearer home?" says Dora, quietly. Dora always does the correct thing.

"Just so," exclaims Sir George, who would have thought Jericho a very convenient spot had Dora so named it. "We have another Wishing Well somewhere in the neighbourhood—eh, 'Duke?"

"The Deacon's Well," says Sir Mark, "is only seven miles from this—would that be too far, Lady Handcock?"

"I shall be quite unhappy if you make me the disturber of the peace," says Harriet, in comic despair. "Let me stay at home—I shall do very well—and at present I feel ashamed of myself."

"Nonsense!" says 'Duke. "If you don't come willingly we shall carry you. So you may as well make up your mind to visit the Deacon."

"And it is really the prettiest well of the two," says Blanche, gracefully, as she sees her cause fall to the ground.

"Then you and Blanche can keep each other company on the coach, Phyllis, and anyone else that likes. Thornton shall have the horn—it is

about the one instrument on which he can perform with marked success."

"I shall take the phaeton and my ponies," say I quietly. "They have not been out for two days, and it will do them good. Exercise is the only thing that keeps them in order."

"Oh, nonsense, Phyllis; you will find it much pleasanter with Blanche and the rest of us."

"Without doubt; but then I have set my heart on driving my ponies. They are my hobby at present; so you must excuse my bad taste if I say I prefer being with them to even the good company you mention. That is, if I can get anyone to come and take care of me."

"I shall be most happy, Mrs. Carrington, if you will accept me as your escort," says Sir Mark instantly, as though desirous of being the first to offer his services.

Blanche Going raises her head and regards him fixedly. In the velvet softness of her dark eyes shines for an instant an expression that is half reproach, half passionate anger; only for an instant; then turning her glance on me, she meets my gaze full, and sneers unmistakably. I feel radiant, triumphant. At least I have it in my power to give her sting for sting.

"Thank you," I say to Sir Mark, with a beaming smile. "I shall feel quite safe and happy in my mind with you. At heart I believe I am a coward,

so feel it pleasant to know there will be help at hand, if the ponies prove refractory."

"You had better take a groom with you, Phyllis," says my husband, shortly.

"Oh, no, thank you. It will be quite unnecessary. Sir Mark, I know, is as good as two or three grooms in a case of emergency."

"Nevertheless, I think you had better have a groom. Those ponies are generally skittish after any idleness. I shall tell Markham to accompany you."

"Pray do not give yourself the trouble," I reply, obstinately; "I shall not need him. You do not think there is any cause for fear, do you, Sir Mark?"

"I think not. I think I am a match for your ponies at any moment," returns he, smiling.

"In my opinion grooms are a mistake in a small carriage," murmurs Lady Blanche, addressing the table generally. "There is something unpleasant in the fact that they are close behind one's back ready to hear and repeat every idle word one may chance to utter." Her smile as she says this is innocence itself.

"I fully agree with you," answer I, equably; "though Sir Mark and I are above uttering anything idle."

Marmaduke frowns, and the conversation ends.

Meantime the others have been eagerly dis-

cussing their plans. Sir George Ashurst has obtained a promise from Dora to take the seat beside him on his dog-cart. Harriet has decided on the open carriage, and declares her intention of calling and taking up mamma. Lord Chandos alone has had no part in the discussion.

Just then the door opens to admit Bébé, fresh and gay as usual. Positively we have all forgotten Bébé.

"Late—late—so late!" says she, laughing. "Yes, Marmaduke, I know it is actually shocking. Don't say a word, dear; your face is a volume in itself. Good morning, everybody. Phyllis, *you* don't look formidable. I shall have my chair near you."

The men rise, and somebody gets her a seat.

"Bébé, we forgot you," cry I, contritely. "Where shall we put you now?"

"Put me?" says Bébé, regarding her chair, "Why, here, I suppose."

"No, no—about our drive to the Wishing Well, I mean. We have just been arranging everything, and somehow you got left out."

"I have still two seats at the back of my trap," says Ashurst; "will you accept one, Miss Beatoun? And Chandos can have the other."

The faintest possible tinge of colour rises to Bébé's cheek.

"A back seat! Oh! Sir George, is that all you can offer me? I was never so insulted in my life.

It is positively unkind. Marmaduke, why did not you look after my interests in my absence?"

"I don't know how it happened. First come first served, I suppose."

"The unkindest cut of all. 'Duke, you are ungenerous, or else in a bad temper—which? However, I forgive you."

"I would give you the front seat," says good-natured George, "but I fear those very tiny little hands would never be able for the ribbons; and I have given the other to Miss Vernon."

"Miss Beatoun, have my place," says Thornton, eagerly. "I daresay Miss Hastings will get on without me, even if she comes; and Powell can blow the horn."

Dora comes forward gracefully. "Take mine," she says, in spite of a reproachful glance from Sir George. "I don't in the least mind where I sit."

"*Embarras de richesses!*" cries Bébé, laughing, putting up her hands to cover her ears. "Not for all the world, Miss Vernon. Thank you very much all the same. Did you think I was in earnest? If the truth be told, I like nothing better than the back seat on anything, if the horses be fast. There is something delicious, almost sensational, in finding oneself flying through the air without seeing what is taking one. I only hope I shan't fall off."

"It will be Chandos' fault if you do," declares Sir George. "Do you hear, Chandos? You will

have to keep your eyes open, and be careful every time we come to a corner."

Bébé colours again, and glances at Lord Chandos, who by a curious coincidence she finds glancing at her. Their eyes meet.

"Will you find the task too arduous?" she asks, mischievously, for once losing sight of her coldness.

"I will tell you that when we return," replies he, answering her smile.

Not until the others have well departed does Markham bring round the ponies; and as he puts the reins into my hands he utters a gentle warning.

"I thought it safer to let the other horses get a bit of a start first, ma'am," he says. "You might spare the whip to-day, I'm thinking; they're that fresh as it will give you enough to do to hold 'em."

"All right, Markham," says my companion, gaily; "I will see your mistress does not irritate them to madness."

The pretty animals in question toss their heads knowingly, then lower them, and finally start away down the avenue, round the corner, past the beeches, and out into the open road.

The air is fresh and soft, the speed, to say the least of it, enlivening, and for a mile or so I know thorough enjoyment; then my arms begin to drag.

"How they do pull!" I say, with a petulant sigh.

"Let me have the reins," exclaims Sir Mark,

eagerly; "you will be exhausted if you try to hold those fretful creatures for the next six miles. You are hardly strong enough for the task." And, with a gesture that is almost relief, I resign to him my seat.

"That would be the nearest road to Carston, supposing we had started from Summerleas," I say presently, as we come to one particular turn. "Oh, how often, long ago, I used to travel it! What years and years and years seem to have gone by since last spring! What changes have occurred! And yet in reality only a few short months have passed."

"Happy changes, I hope, Mrs. Carrington."

"For me? Yes indeed. When first you knew me I was the most insignificant person amongst us at home, and now I think I have all I ever wished for."

Sir Mark smiles.

"I never heard anyone say that before. Of what use will the Deacon's Well be to you? Do you mean to tell me you have no wish left ungratified?"

"Well, perhaps there are a few things I would willingly put out of my way," I reply, with a faint recurrence in my own mind to Lady Blanche Going.

"Only things? You are fortunate. When I go in for that useless sort of wishing it is people—not *things*—I would have removed. Were I you, Mrs. Carrington, I believe I should live in a perpetual

state of terror, waiting for some blow to fall to crush such excessive happiness. You know one cannot be prosperous for ever."

"I never anticipate evil," return I, lightly. "Surely it is bad enough when it comes, without adding to it by being miserable before-hand. Why, how doleful you look! What is it? You remind me of some youthful swain in love for the first time in his life."

"Perhaps I am."

"In love? How amusing! With whom then? Bébé? Dora? Or some person or persons unknown? Come, surely you may confide with all safety in your hostess."

"She is the last person I would choose as a confidante on this occasion. The sympathy she would accord me would be very scanty."

"Oh, how unjust! Have I proved myself so utterly heartless? And is sympathy so very needful in your case—is it a hopeless one?"

"Quite so."

"Poor Sir Mark! 'If she be not fair to me, what care I how fair she be?' is a very good motto—why not adopt it, and—love again? I have heard there is nothing easier."

"Would you find it easy?"

"I don't know, having never tried. But if to love is to be unhappy I wonder people ever let themselves fall into the snare."

"You speak as if you yourself were free from the gentle passion," says Sir Mark, with a searching look, under which I colour and feel somewhat confused.

"We were talking of second lovers," I say, hurriedly. "One hears of them. I was advising you to turn your attention that way. Surely it would be possible."

"I don't believe in it—at least to me it would be impossible," replies Sir Mark, in a low tone, and silence falls upon me.

Once again I am in the ballroom at Strangemore, listening to a tale of early love. Is Sir Mark thinking of Marmaduke now, I wonder, and the story he then told me, of his old infatuation for his cousin Blanche? Was it more than an infatuation—a passing fancy? Was it an honest, lasting attachment? And have I secured but the tired, worn-out remnant of a once strong passion?

My changeful spirits, so prone to rise, so easy to dash to earth, again forsake me. Discontented and uncertain, I sit with lowered lids and fretful, puckered brow.

"Do you, then, think a man can love but once in his life?" I force myself to ask, though with open hesitation.

"But once? Is it not enough? Would you condemn anyone to suffer the restless misery, the un-

satisfied longing a second time?" responds he, moodily.

"No; but it is bad for those who come after," I reply, with deep dejection.

"They must take their chance. The suffering cannot be all on one side. We must accept our share of misery as it comes with the best grace we can."

"I will not," I cry, passionately. "All my life I have determined to be happy, and I will succeed. Whatever happens, whatever comes of it, I refuse to be miserable."

"What a child you are!" says he, almost pityingly.

"I am not. I am talking quite rationally. I firmly believe we all make half our own grievances."

"And what becomes of the other half?"

"Let us leave the subject," I say, petulantly, ignoring my inability to answer him. "You are very dull and prosy. If you insist on being a martyr, be one, but do not insist also on my following in your footsteps. Because you choose to imagine yourself unhappy is no reason why I should not be gay."

"Certainly not," replies he, with increasing gloom, and brings the whip down sharply across the ponies' backs.

Instantly, almost as the lash touches their glossy skins, they resent the insult. The carriage receives

a violent shock. They fling themselves backwards on their haunches, and in another moment are flying wildly on, regardless of bit or curb or rein.

As I realise the situation I grow mad with fright. Losing all sense of self-control, I rise from my seat and prepare to throw myself out of the phaeton. Surely the hard and stony road must be preferable to this reckless deadly flight.

Seeing my intention, Sir Mark rises also.

"Phyllis, are you mad?" cries he, flinging his arms round me. "Your only chance is to remain quiet. Phyllis, be sensible. Sit down when I desire you."

There is an almost savage ring in his tone. He holds me fast and forces me down into my seat. I struggle with all my strength for a moment or two to free myself from his strong grasp, and then a coldness covers me and I faint.

When my senses return to me I find I am still in the carriage. The ponies are also to be seen, motionless in their places, except for the trembling that convulses their frames, while a fierce snort every now and then, and tiny flecks of foam that fly hither and thither and mingle with those already to be seen upon their backs and harness, betray their late irritation. But we are safe, apparently, quite safe.

Sir Mark's arm is supporting me, while with his other hand he holds something to my lips. It is

that detestable thing called brandy, and I turn my head aside.

"Take it," urges he, in a low trembling tone; "whether you like it or not, it will do you good. Try to swallow some."

I do as I am bid, and presently, feeling better, raise myself to look around for symptoms of a smash.

"What have they done?" I ask, with a shudder. "Have they——"

"Nothing," replies he, with a laugh that is rather forced. "It was a mere bolt. If you had not fainted you would have known it was all over in a few minutes."

"It was the whip," I whisper, still nervous.

"Yes, it was all my fault. I quite forgot Markham's caution. I have to apologise very sincerely for my mistake."

"Never mind apologies," I say, laughing, "as we are safe. I never remember being so terrified in my life—not even when my steed nearly deposited me in the middle of the High Street in Carston. And you," I continue, in a half-amused tone, peering at him from under my hat; "you were frightened too? Confess it."

"I was," returns he, carefully evading my gaze.

"But why, if, as you say, there was no danger?"

"There are worse things than runaway ponies—your fainting, for instance. I thought you were

never going to open your eyes again, you looked so horribly white and cold—so like death."

"What a lovely picture!" laughing involuntarily. "Well, console yourself; you have seen what nobody else ever saw—Phyllis Carrington fainting. I had no idea I had it in me. I really think I must be growing delicate or weak-minded."

In silence Sir Mark gathers up the reins, and once more the ponies start forward.

"Now, Dora can faint to perfection," I go on, finding immense enjoyment in my subject. "If she is vexed or troubled in any way, or hears thunder, she can go off gracefully into the arms of whoever happens to be nearest to her at the time. She never falls; it is indeed wonderful how accurately she can measure distance, even at the last moment. While as for me I do believe if I were scolded until nothing more was left to be said, or if it thundered and lightened from this until to-morrow, it would not have the effect of removing my senses. At least up to this I have found it so—for the future I shall be less certain. But how silent you are, and how cross you look! Still thinking of the obdurate fair one?"

"Of her—and many other things."

"Well, perhaps she too is thinking of you."

"I can imagine nothing more probable," with a grim smile.

"Neither can I." My treacherous spirits are

again ascending. "Let me describe her to you as at this moment I almost think I can see her. Seated in a bower, enshrined in roses and honeysuckles, with her hands folded listlessly upon her lap, and her large dreamy black eyes (I am sure her eyes are black) filled with repentant tears, she is now remembering with what cruel coldness she received your advances; while unmolested the pretty earwigs run races all over her simple white dress—simple but elegant, you know——"

"H'm—yes."

"And now remorse has proved too much for her: she resolves on writing you a letter expressing contrition for her past heartlessness. She draws towards her paper, pens, and ink (in a three-volume novel the heroine has everything at her hand, even in the most unlikely places—there is never any fuss or scramble), and indites you a perfumed and coroneted note, which you will receive—to-morrow. There! Now, don't you feel better?"

"Infinitely so."

"What! still frowning—still in the lowest depths? I begin to doubt my power to comfort you."

"I don't feel any inclination to jest on the subject," returns Sir Mark, gruffly, making a vicious blow with the whip at an unoffending and nearly lifeless fly.

"Well, there," I gasp, in a sudden access of

terror lest he might again incense the ponies, "I will jest no more. And don't despair. Perhaps—who knows?—she may grow fond of you in time."

He laughs a short bitter laugh that yet has something in it of dismal merriment. "If I could only tell you," he says, "if you only knew, you would understand what a double mockery are such words coming from your lips."

His fingers close round the whip again. Again frightened, I hastily clutch his arm.

"Don't do that," I entreat; "please do not use that dreadful whip again—remember the last time you did so we were nearly killed."

"I wish we had been altogether so," mutters he, savagely.

I stare at him in speechless surprise. Did that flask contain *much* brandy? What on earth has happened to our careless, debonair Sir Mark?

Even as I gaze in wonder he turns his head and looks with some degree of shame into my widely opened astonished eyes.

"Pardon me," he says, gently. "I don't know what has come to me to-day. I fail to understand myself. I doubt I am an ill-tempered brute, and have hardly any right even to hope for your forgiveness."

But his manner has effectually checked my burst of eloquence, and we keep unbroken silence until we reach our destination.

Here we find Marmaduke and Lady Blanche, anxiously on the look-out for us; the others, tired of waiting, have wandered farther afield. Marmaduke is looking rather white and worried, I fancy.

"What has kept you until this hour?" he asks, irritably, pulling out his watch.

"Oh, how long you have been!" supplements Blanche. "We were beginning to wonder—almost to fear an accident had occurred. It is quite a relief to see you in the flesh."

"You were very near not seeing us," I explain. "The ponies behaved very badly—ran away with us for half a mile or so—and frightened me so much that I fainted."

"How distressing!" says Blanche, apparently much concerned. "How terrified you must have been! And so unpleasant too, without a lady near to help you! You were able to recover Mrs. Carrington, at all events." To Sir Mark.

"Well, I don't suppose I would have been of much use without the brandy," replies he, coolly.

"It must have been quite a sentimental scene," remarks her ladyship, with a little laugh. "It reminds one of something one would read—only, to make it perfect, you should be lovers. Now that you are safe it does not seem unkind to laugh—does it?"

Marmaduke by this time is black as night. In spite of myself I know I have blushed crimson;

while Sir Mark, turning abruptly away, goes to explain some trivial break in the harness to one of the coachmen.

"It is a pity, Phyllis, you would not take my advice this morning," says 'Duke, in a voice that trembles a little, either from suppressed anger or some other emotion. "If you had taken a groom, as I begged of you, all this unpleasantness might have been saved."

"I don't see how a groom could have prevented it," I reply, coldly. "Without a second's warning they were off—it was nobody's fault."

"My dear 'Duke, we should be thankful they have escaped so well," murmurs Blanche, in her softest tones, laying a soothing touch upon my husband's arm. Both touch and tone render me furious. "I daresay it was not very serious."

"I daresay not; but it might have been. And, whether or not, it has kept everyone waiting for at least three-quarters of an hour."

"It might have kept you still longer had I been killed," I return, quietly, moving away in secret indignation.

Marmaduke follows me, leaving Blanche and Sir Mark to come after, and side by side, but speechless, we proceed on our way.

At length, in a rather milder tone, Marmaduke says: "I hope—otherwise—your drive was enjoyable."

"Very much so, thank you. Though I must say

I don't care about feeling my life in danger. I hope you enjoyed yours."

"No"—shortly—"I did not; I never enjoyed anything less."

"How unfortunate! Was her ladyship thoughtful or ill-tempered, or what?"

"She had nothing to do with it. I was thinking of you the entire time."

"Of me! How good of you! I am so sorry I cannot return the compliment, but no one was farther from my thoughts than you. Concluding you were happy, I dismissed you from my memory."

"I had a presentiment about those ponies."

"Ah! it was the ponies occupied your mind—not their mistress. That sounds far more natural."

"They are vicious, and not to be depended upon," continues 'Duke, declining to notice my interruption. "I shall dispose of them the very first opportunity."

"Indeed you shall do nothing of the kind. They are mine, and I will not have them sold."

"Well, keep them, if you insist upon it; but certainly you shall never drive them again."

"Then I certainly shall; and to-morrow most probably. I will not be ordered about as though I were a mere baby."

Marmaduke turns, and regards me so steadily and gravely that at length in spite of myself my eyes submit and droop.

"Phyllis, how changed you are!" says he presently, in a low tone. "When first I knew you—even two months ago—you were a soft, tender, gentle little girl; and now you are always unjust and bitter—to me, at least."

Something rises in my throat and prevents my utterance. Large tears gather in my eyes.

"I *am* changed—I know it," I burst out suddenly. "Before I married you I was a different person altogether. And how can I help being 'bitter' at times? Even now, when I told you how near death I had been, you showed no feeling of regret—thought of nothing but the delay I had occasioned you and your friends."

"Oh, Phyllis!" says 'Duke, in a tone that implies I have wrung his heart by my false accusations, and before either of us can again speak we have passed a hillock and are in full view of our guests.

They are all scattered about in twos and threes, though none are very far distant from the others; and the scene is more than usually picturesque. Certainly the old Deacon knew what he was about when he placed his well in this charming spot. It is a little fairy-like nook, fresh and green—lying forgotten amongst the hills. A few pieces of broken-down ivy-covered wall partially conceal the steps leading to the Wishing Well.

"'Duke, let us wish for dinner—and *get* it—before we wish for anything else," entreats Bébé.

"The drive has given me a horrible appetite. I am generally a very nice person—eh, Mr. Thornton?—but just at present I am feeling a downright unladylike desire for food. Phyllis, darling, do say you are hungry."

"I am—starving," I reply, though conscious at the moment that the smallest morsel would choke me.

"Yes, by all means. 'Business first, pleasure afterwards,'" quotes Chips, blithely, who is stretched full length by Miss Beatoun's side, with his hat off and a straw in his mouth, looking extremely handsome and unspeakably happy. Lord Chandos is at her other side, though rather farther away.

"What do you say, Phyllis?" asks 'Duke, looking at me.

"Do not take me into consideration at all," I return, in a suppressed voice. "Dinner now, or in five hours to come, would be quite the same thing to me."

I move quickly away from him towards mamma as I say this, and, sinking down on the turf very close to her, slip my hand into hers; and as I feel her gentle fingers closing upon mine a sense of safety and relief creeps slowly over me.

Dinner progresses; and, though I will not acknowledge it, I begin to feel decidedly better. Fragments of conversation float here and there.

"I have a great mind to set my little dog at you," says Bébé, in reply to some flagrant compli-

ment bestowed upon her by the devoted Chips. A little *bijou* of a dog, with an elaborate collar and beseeching eyes, that sits upon her knee and takes its dinner from her pretty white fingers, is the animal in question.

"Oh, please, don't," murmurs Chips, pathetically; "I am so horribly afraid of your little dog. You would not like me to die of nervous excitement, would you?"

"I am not so sure. It would make room for a better man."

"Impossible. There isn't a better fellow going than I am. You ask my mamma when you see her."

"I need not ask anybody; I can see for myself. What do you do all day long but play billiards?"

"I beg your pardon, Miss Beatoun. You estimate my capabilities at a very improper level. I do no end of things besides billiards—I shoot, smoke, eat, and—talk to you."

"What a way to spend one's life!" severely. "I wonder where you think you will go when you die?"

"I hope wherever you go. I say"—piteously—"don't scold a fellow on such a splendid day—don't —it's uncommon afflicting of you; and don't put on your gloves for a little longer."

"Why?"

"Because I like looking at your hands, though at the same time they always irritate me. They

are the very prettiest I ever saw; and—forgive me for saying it—but I always want to kiss them. Now, don't begin again, please—remember you have lectured me for a good hour."

"Then I have wasted a good hour and done nothing. I give you up—you are past cure."

"I remember coming here once before," breaks in Lottie Hastings' voice, "and wishing for something, and I really got it before the year was out."

"Must one wait a whole year?" asks Sir Mark. "Then I shall have to write mine down. Give you my word if my own name was suppressed for a year I don't believe I would recollect what it was at the end of it."

"Are we bound by law to name our wishes?" asks Chips, earnestly. "Because, if so, I shall have to sink into the ground with shame. I'm horrid bashful—that is my most glaring fault, you know, Miss Beatoun—and I would not disclose my secret desire for anything you could offer."

"For anything I could offer," repeats Miss Beatoun. "Are you sure? Shall I tempt you? Would you not, for instance, take——" The eyes say the rest.

"Don't," exclaims Thornton, putting his hands over his ears. "I won't listen to you. I refuse to understand. Miss Hastings, will you permit me to sit by you? Miss Beatoun is behaving with more than her usual cruelty."

"Come," says Miss Hastings, smiling, and putting aside her dress, to give him room to seat himself on the grass near her.

As Chips leaves Bébé, Lord Chandos quietly slips into his place, to Miss Beatoun's evident surprise.

"Is it fair to encourage that poor boy so very openly?" begins Chandos, calmly.

"What?" says Miss Beatoun.

"Is it kind to flirt so much with young Thornton?" repeats Lord Chandos, still perfectly calm.

"You must make a mistake," says Bébé, provokingly. "You know I never flirt. In the first place, I don't consider it good form."

"Neither do I consider it 'good form' for a young lady to talk slang," very gravely and quietly. "I wouldn't do it if I were you."

"How do you know what you would do if you were I?"

"At all events, you must acknowledge it is not becoming."

"Do you profess to understand what is becoming to young ladies? Have you been studying them? Come, then, if you are so good a judge, I will ask you to tell me if this hat is so very becoming as they all say. Look well, now, before you decide; it is a question of the utmost importance."

This saucy little speech is accompanied by such a bewitching glance from under the said hat that

Lord Chandos loses his presence of mind. "I cannot bear to see you flirt so much as you do with everyone," he mutters, hastily; "it tortures me. Bébé, why is it?"

Miss Beatoun grows decidedly white, even to her lips, yet is still thoroughly composed.

"But *do* I flirt?" she says. "I don't believe I do. Do you believe it, my darling, my treasure, my Tito?" to the dog. "Not you. No, no, Lord Chandos, it is not that at all."

"What is it, then?" impatiently.

"Why, it is 'everyone' who flirts with me, to be sure. And that is not my fault, is it?" with the most bewildering assumption of injured innocence.

And now we all rise and saunter towards the well.

"If you would only wish as I do," whispers Sir George to Dora, "I would be the happiest man alive."

"Would you?" says innocent Dora. "But how shall I know what you are longing for?"

"Can you not guess?"

"I am afraid I cannot. Unless, perhaps—but no, of course it would not be that. Indeed, I do not know how to reach your thoughts. One must want so many things."

"I want only one."

"Only one! Oh, how moderate! Only one. Let me see," with a deliciously meditative air and two slender fingers pressed upon her lips.

"Shall I tell you?"

"Oh, no, no," with a pretty show of eager fear. "If you told anyone, the charm would be broken, and you would not get what you want. Perhaps—who knows?—the boon I am going to demand will be the very thing you would tell me." This with a sufficiently tender glance from the lustrous azure eyes.

"For my part," says Bébé, wilfully, "I shall wish for something I can never get, just to prove how absurd it all is."

"From time to time we everyone of us do that," says Chandos. "We hanker after the impossible. I begin to fear I shall never get my heart's desire." He glances expressively at Bébé.

"Then think of something else," suggests that young lady, smoothly. "Your second venture may be more successful."

"No, I shall keep to my original wish, until I either gain it or else find further hoping folly."

"Phyllis, it is your turn now. Will you not descend and court fortune?" calls Harriet.

I am deeply engaged listening to mamma while she reads to me Billy's last effusion from Eton, to which place he returned the second day after our ball.

"It is a pity to disturb Mrs. Carrington," says Sir Mark. "She told me this morning she had not a wish left ungratified."

Marmaduke raises his head quickly, and, flush-

ing warmly, turns a pleased and rather surprised glance on me.

"Nevertheless, I will come," I cry, incautiously, springing to my feet, "and beg for the continuance of my happiness, which includes everything."

"Oh, Phyllis!" cries Bébé.

"Oh, Mrs. Carrington," exclaims Sir Mark, "what a rash proceeding! Why did you say it aloud? You have destroyed every chance of receiving that good gift."

"Yes?" say I, "how provoking! Never mind, contentment still remains; and that, I have heard, is quite as much to be desired."

Everybody laughs heartily, and Marmaduke says: "You will get nothing, Phyllis, if you declare your wants so openly."

"Neither happiness nor contentment? How dismal!" exclaim I, laughing too. "Well, I shall keep my third and last thought to myself."

And, having hoped in my own mind that Lord Chandos would very soon again ask Bébé to be his wife, I go through the form of drinking a little of the pure spring-water Master Chips proffers me with due solemnity.

The principal business of the day being concluded, our party once more breaks up into detachments, some straying out of sight in pretended search of scenery, some following their example in an opposite direction without any pretence at all.

Sinking down again by mother's side, I content myself with her and Harriet, while Marmaduke and Sir James stay to bear us company, and smoke unlimited cigars, while offering a lazy remark every now and then.

"Do you feel no desire to investigate the neighbourhood?" asks Sir Mark of me, carelessly, as he passes by; and as I answer "No," with a smile and shake of my head, he saunters off towards Lottie Hastings, with whom he commences a flirtation, calm but vigorous.

Somehow it is a peaceful hour we spend, and one that drives from me the vague irritation that before tormented me. In the quiet of the present I forget all life's vexations, and remember only such good things as are within my grasp. How paltry now seem the troubles that oppress me! I fear—yet know not what it is I fear. I doubt—yet, if compelled to do so, would find a difficulty in giving my doubt a name.

This sweeter mood continues and travels home with me, although we do not reach Strangemore until it is nearly nine.

Here, at an early supper, we all find ourselves in the wildest spirits. Glancing curiously at Dora, attracted by some nameless new expression in her eyes, I feel convinced the day has been to her one of unmixed triumph, and that already the Wishing Well has granted her desire.

As I get near her in the drawing-room I manage to whisper, "What is it, Dora? Did he? Are you——"

"Yes, he *did*, and I *am*," responds Dora, with a smile of unusual liveliness for her. "To-night you shall know all."

. . . . .

"How was it, Dora? How did it happen?" I ask, two hours later, as I sit opposite to her, my hands embracing my knees, in my favourite position, my head bent forward in eager anticipation of her news.

"I hardly know. It was all that Wishing Well, I fancy. For the future I shall feel it my duty to be superstitious. At all events, it surely helped to bring it about, as he only wanted the opportunity to declare himself," says Dora, complacently.

"What did he say, Dora? Was he nervous—or——"

"Very nervous. He seemed quite afraid to come to the point. You see I am always so distant in my manner," says my modest sister, "he had no way of judging what my answer was likely to be."

"I am sure whatever he said was just what it should be, he is so thoroughly sincere," I remark, still anxious to get at the root of the matter.

"I am afraid I cannot altogether satisfy your curiosity, Phyllis, it has all got so mixed up. Of course he told me principally what I knew before:

that he adored me, for instance, and was desirous of marrying me, and so forth. He was slightly incoherent, I thought; but it really signified very little whether his English was good or bad, so long as I managed to understand what he meant."

"Of course not, darling. Oh, Dora, I am so sorry we let mamma go without telling her!"

"I did tell her, dear. At least—that is, he—George told her." She brings out the Christian name of her beloved with a charming amount of diffidence. "He said he would like to make sure of me; and indeed I thought myself—it might perhaps be as well—he should be the one to mention it to her—as a settled thing. You understand?"

I do, and begin to entertain rather an admiration for Dora's astuteness.

"You will forgive me now, Dora?" I say, suddenly, leaning over to put my hand on hers.

"Forgive you? Forgive what?"

"Well, dear, when I married 'Duke, you know, I thought you were rather vexed, you said so many things; and sometimes I have fancied since you still think I was in the wrong."

"My dear Phyllis, what a curious girl you are! 'Forgive you!' As if I had not done so ages and ages ago—if, indeed, there was anything to forgive. Surely you cannot have thought me so vindictive, so unchristian, as to retain bitter feelings against you all this time?"

She has opened her childish blue eyes to their widest, and is gazing at me plaintively, as though grieved I should imagine her capable of any vile feeling.

"I sometimes feared——" I stammer, utterly abashed in the presence of so much sweetness.

"You must put such ideas out of your head, Phyllis—they are very unworthy. I never harbour unforgiving thoughts, I should hope, towards anyone —least of all towards you, my sister. Besides, I ought really to be thankful to you, if anything. Marmaduke and I would have been most unsuited to each other. He is far too exigeant and masterful for my taste—George is in every way more desirable."

I don't quite see all this, but reserve my sentiments.

"He is greatly to be liked," I say with truth—honest, good-natured George Ashurst having won his way into my affections long since. "I don't know that I was ever more delighted about anything in my life."

"Yes—everybody will be pleased, I imagine, papa and mamma especially. I don't see how papa can make the faintest objection in any way. He must feel gratified."

I think of Sir George's rentroll, and have the words "I should think so indeed" upon the tip of my tongue. But, being desirous of keeping up

friendly relations with Dora, refrain from uttering them. She evidently takes her good fortune as a matter of course, having ever rated herself at a high price, and believes she has got her bare deserts—no more.

"I hope you—that is, I hope he will be very good to you," I say, making the correction in time.

"I hope we shall be very good to each other. Indeed, I see nothing to prevent our being quite happy and—comfortable. Don't you think he appears very fond of me?"

"More than that—I think he appears to love you very dearly."

"Yes, I really think he does," says my sister, running her fingers lazily through her silky yellow hair.

"And you, Dora—do you love him?"

"Of course, dear. Would I marry him else? Am I the sort of person to sell myself for mere money's sake?" Indignation of the mild and virtuous order is in her tone. "No," says Dora, calmly looking me fair in the eyes, "I would not marry a man unless I loved him—not if he had the mines of Golconda."

This ennobling sentiment is, I feel, aimed at me, and justly judge it will be unwise to press the matter farther; so I say: "I am so glad, darling!" but say it very weakly.

"Nevertheless," goes on Dora, after a moment's

pause, "as I *do* love him it is very fortunate he should be so well off. Yesterday he told me he had 20,000*l.* a year. Rather more than you have, dear, is it not?" sweetly.

No. Dora has not yet forgiven me.

"A great deal more," I say, warmly; "we have only fifteen. But then, Dora, it was only to be expected you would make a far better match than I could."

"Well—yes—perhaps so," admits Dora, casting an admiring glance at her own pretty shell-pink face as it smiles back at her from an opposite mirror.

The door opens and Marmaduke comes in.

"Oh, 'Duke!" I cry, rising, "just fancy—Dora is—but you shall guess my news—what is she?"

"That is a rather embarrassing question," says he, smiling. "Were I to tell you all that Dora is in my eyes, we would get no sleep to-night."

Dora laughs, and I say, "Nonsense! A list of her perfections would be no news—we all know them. Tell me what you think has occurred to her since this morning."

"I think she has become engaged to George Ashurst," returns 'Duke, coolly. "Why, you foolish child, do you call that news? Ashurst has told every one in the house of his good luck by this time. If I were you, Dora, I would breakfast in my room to-morrow morning. You will never be able to stand all the congratulations."

"How can he be so absurd!" murmurs Dora, for once in her life genuinely confused, a rich red colouring her cheeks.

"I congratulate you with all my heart," says 'Duke, kindly, kissing her. "You have got as good a husband as any girl could desire, and as rich a one, too, without doubt. We shall be small people, Phyllis, you and I, next to my Lady Ashurst."

"I must not stay to hear any more flattery. Thank you very much for all you have said," replies Dora, gracefully; and, having bidden us both good night, goes off to her own room.

Everyone in the house is immensely delighted. An engagement, even when everything belonging to it goes smoothly and suitably, cannot fail to awaken interest in the heart of a woman; and, Dora's lover being uncoveted by any of us, no jealousy shows itself to mar the universal good feeling.

We chatter about it all next day, and tell each other we had seen how it would end from the very beginning. We dilate on the charming place he has in Surrey—his palace in the North; and then we whisper of what a detestable creature is his mother; while Bébé hopes Dora will have courage to put a veto at once against any lengthened visiting on her part.

"Because," says Miss Beatoun, "we *all* know where *that* will lead. When Ashurst's brother married Lady Octavia Dering his mother invited her-

self to pay them a month's visit—and she stayed ten—and it was the doctor and the nurse eventually who insisted on putting her out, shortly after the boy was born. They say poor Lady Octavia nearly went out of her mind one morning, when, on going into her nursery, she found the old lady deliberately pouring some nauseous homœpathic medicine down the child's throat. Octavia told me herself, with tears in her eyes, the poor little fellow was all but in a fit for two hours afterwards. She is really a very shocking old person, and should be suppressed. I do hope dear Dora will gather together all her pluck and try to be a match for her."

Secretly I feel so assured of dear Dora's being a "match" for any mother-in-law alive that I endure no uneasy pangs on this count. She bears the congratulations and the little good-natured banterings admirably; is modest without being stupidly shy, and prettily conscious without betraying any symptoms of *gaucherie*. She is, indeed, as perfect in her new *rôle* of bride-elect as though she had sustained the part for years.

"Sir George must be a favourite with the gods —let us hope he won't die young," says Sir Mark, bending over Dora, some time during the evening. "He has had everything he could possibly desire from his cradle upwards—money, friends, position; and now he must get *you*. I think,"—in a playfully injured tone—"the good things of this life are very

unequally divided. In common justice Ashurst should have been forced into matrimony with a woman as ugly, ill-tempered, and altogether disenchanting as—his mamma, instead of which——" He sighs audibly and makes an eloquent pause.

Dora smiles her usual soft, serene smile, untouched by coquetry—that experience has taught me means so little—and raises one white hand in deprecation. Dora's hands are faultless—filbert-nailed, creamy-white, pink-tinged, with just sufficient blue tracery of the most delicate kind here and there to call attention to their beauty.

"*Is* Lady Ashurst all that you say?—so *very* terrific? How unhappy you make me!" she murmurs plaintively, demurely ignoring the other parts of his speech.

CHAPTER II.

FRESH and keen, and decidedly chilly, blows the October wind. The men have all deserted us and gone out shooting. The women are scattered through the house.

Crossing the hall and the smaller drawing room, I meet no one; and, entering the larger apartment beyond, seek my favourite seat in the bow-window, where, book in hand, I ensconce myself behind the

curtains, and, stretching myself upon a lounger, prepare to be lazily happy. The lace draperies falling round me entirely conceal me from view; I can see right into the conservatory without turning my head, and the seductive breath of flowers stealing towards me adds one more thrill to my enjoyment.

Steadily I turn page after page. I feel I am growing interested—a very little later I feel I am growing sleepy. My lids droop. Putting my book down upon my lap, with, of course, the settled intention of taking it up again directly, I yawn mildly.

The door opens; with a start I become aware of Bébé's entrance. To admit I am present means conversation, and conversation with this drowsy fit upon me means misery. I therefore keep breathless silence, and Bébé, all unconscious, saunters past me, basket and scissors in hand, and goes into the conservatory.

I watch her dreamily as with a business-like air she drags the light garden-ladder forward and, mounting, commences to clip my very choicest blossoms for her own secret purposes.

One by one they fall into her basket. Has she no conscience? Or has she forgotten it is already October, and that flowers grow scarce? I confess to some faint indignation as I regard her, and have almost decided on rousing to remonstrate with her in person, when a firm but hasty footstep upon the gravel outside excites my curiosity.

A moment later Lord Chandos pushes open the door of the conservatory, and, entering, stops short, his gaze fixed upon Miss Beatoun.

As for Bébé, between looking suddenly round and surprise at his unexpected presence there, she loses all idea of balance, and is in the act of coming with undue hurry to the ground, when Lord Chandos, stepping quickly forward, catches her and lifts her lightly down. Perhaps he is a trifle longer in the performance of this deed than is strictly necessary.

"Oh! how could you frighten one so?" exclaims Bébé, colouring, and speaking ungratefully, as it seems to me, considering he has just saved her from a heavy fall. "I thought you were out shooting with the others."

"So I was; but—I forgot something, and had to return for it."

"What did you forget—your pipe?"

"No, my gun," replies he, in the most barefaced fashion possible.

"Oh!" cries Miss Beatoun, lengthily, and then they both laugh.

"Why don't you admit at once you had no intention of shooting to-day? It would have been much honester."

"Because admissions are dangerous. It is always better policy to leave people in doubt. Yet, as I never class you in my own mind under the head of

'people,' I will confess to you it is not so much forgetfulness causes my presence here just now as a settled determination not to remember. My conscience was anything but clean when I said I had mislaid something, and should come back to find it."

"Was it really your gun?"

"No; I think I put it on cartridges or a handkerchief or—I am not clear what."

"And why? What was your motive? I fancied you an indefatigable sportsman—one impossible to turn aside from your prey."

"Shall I tell you my motive?" asks Chandos, in such an utterly changed low tone that Miss Beatoun, standing near the ladder, lays her hand suddenly upon it to steady herself and retreats a step.

"Better not," she says, in a voice that trembles apprehensively, in spite of all her efforts to be calm. "Remember what you said a moment since: 'Admissions are dangerous.' Better leave me in doubt."

"I cannot. Besides, you are not in doubt. You know what it is I am going to say. I have come back here again to-day to tell you how I have tried, and found it impossible, to crush the love I bear you."

At this juncture I become aware I am in for a scene. The certainty is horrible to me. I am in such an unhappy position as enables me to see them without myself being seen. I can also hear

every word they utter. In fact, there are but very few yards between us.

With shame I now recollect that Bébé once said of me that never would I be accused of "pouncing" upon delicate situations; yet, if I go out now, I shall cover them both with everlasting confusion.

What shall I do? I put my fingers in my ears as a last resource and tightly close my eyes, but somehow they will not keep shut. Every now and then I cannot help glancing to see if they are gone or going; I cannot resist removing my fingers to hear if the conversation has taken a cooler turn.

Every moment I linger only makes my declaring myself more difficult. I end by giving in, and staring and listening with all my might.

Ah! why does Bébé look so determined? Why can't she yield gracefully and be happy? I would at once, were I in her place, and feel no degradation in so doing. She is flushed and miserable to look at, her large eyes seeming larger and darker than usual through pained excitement. Yet still there is so much mistaken pride impressed upon her features as makes me fear for the part she will take in the interview. If she would but listen to her heart's dictation!

"Lord Chandos, I implore you to desist," entreats Bébé, hastily, raising one hand, to prevent his further speech. "It is worse than useless."

But he only imprisons the warning hand and

continues: "Nay, hear me—that is all I ask—and then, if I am again to be rejected, be it so. But surely I have been wretched long enough, and you——"

"I will not listen," murmurs Bébé, more deeply agitated. "The answer I gave you when you were poor is the only answer I can *ever* give you now." Her voice dies away almost to a whisper.

"What do you mean by that?" exclaims Chandos, passionately. "Is the very money that I hailed with delight, principally because I dreamed it might bring me closer to you, to prove a barrier between us? Presumptuous as it may sound, I dare to believe I am not quite indifferent to you. Your manner when we parted, your eyes when we met again down here, have fostered this belief, and yet you shrink from me."

A little inarticulate cry escapes her. One hand goes to her throat—she tries vainly to withdraw the other from his grasp.

"Contradict me—if you can," he says, in a low but vehement tone.

"This is ungenerous—unmanly," she falters, her words half-choked with emotion.

"Contradict me," he reiterates.

"I can—I do," murmurs she, but so weakly that her voice can scarcely be heard.

"Is that the truth, Bébé?" says Chandos, more quietly. "Is pride to come between us now? Dar-

ling, listen to me. If you for one moment imagine I think badly of you because you refused to marry a poor man you wrong me. I think you acted rightly. Even as I asked you that day I felt myself a coward in doing so. Was it honourable of me to seek to drag you down from all the luxuries and enjoyments to which you had been accustomed, to such a life as it was only in my power to offer? Had your answer been different do you believe we would have been happy? I do not."

"You strike at the very root of all romance," protests Bébé, with a rather sad smile.

"I decline to countenance a great deal of rubbish," returns he, vigorously. "Poverty is the surest foe that love can have, I stoutly maintain, in spite of all the poets that ever wrote. But, now that it no longer stands in the way, Bébé, be my wife, and let us forget the past."

"Do you think we should either of us ever forget it?" demands she, raising a small white mournful face to his. "Do you not see how it would come between us every hour of our lives? Even supposing what you say to be true, that I love you, it would be all the greater reason why I should now refuse to be persuaded into doing as you wish. Could I bear to know, day by day, that my husband thought me mercenary?"

"Mercenary! I shall never think you that. How could I? How could any man blame you for shrink-

ing from such a selfish proposal as mine? I tell you again I think you behaved very rightly in the matter."

"Very rightly, no doubt, and very wisely, and very prudently—for myself," replies Bébé, in a cold, bitter way. "Why seek to disguise the truth? If it be true what you have supposed, that I returned your affection, I only proved myself one of those who fear to endure even the smallest privation for the sake of him they love; and what a love that must be!" She laughs contemptuously. "I fear, Lord Chandos, I am not of the stuff of which heroines are made."

"If, as you hint, I am wrong," exclaims Chandos, eagerly catching at a last chance, "if all along I have been deceiving myself in the belief that you cared for me, let me begin again now, and at least try to obtain your affection. If, when——"

"Enough has been said," interrupts she, icily; "too much. Let my hand go, Lord Chandos. I want to find Mrs. Carrington."

(Mrs. Carrington is almost on the verge of lunacy by this time between fright and disappointment.)

"Is there, then, no hope?" asks Chandos, sternly. "Am I to understand that you again reject me?"

"Yes, as you put it in that light. It is your own fault," bursts out Bébé, passionately. "I told you not to speak."

"Had all the world told me the same thing I would still have spoken. Death itself is preferable to suspense. If my persistence has caused you any annoyance, Miss Beatoun, I beg you will forgive me."

"I too would be forgiven," falters Bébé, putting out a cold white hand. As he stoops to kiss it she goes on faintly: "Will you promise me to forget you ever cared for me in—this way?"

"Impossible," returns he, abruptly, and, turning, walks out of the conservatory through the door by which he entered.

Now, is it not provoking? I feel my heart touched with pity for Lord Chandos, with resentment towards his cruel love, until, glancing towards the latter, who has stood motionless since his departure, with head bent and hands loosely clasped, the resentment fades and compassion of the deepest takes its place.

I would give all the world to be able to go meet and comfort her, to twine my arms around her neck, to express my sympathy. But how can I? What a treacherous creature she would think me! How mean! nothing but a pitiful eavesdropper.

Slowly she raises her head, and, breathing a heavy sigh, advances until she stands within the drawing-room.

She is awfully close to me now; I can almost touch her. How on earth am I to meet her again

with this secret on my mind? If I go on feeling as I do now I shall betray myself a thousand times within an hour.

Two large tears gather in her eyes and roll mournfully downwards.

I can bear it no longer. Whatever comes of it, I must make my presence known, and, springing from my couch, I dash aside the thick lace curtains and reveal myself.

Uttering a sharp cry, she recedes a little, then checks herself to stare at me with mingled haughtiness and astonishment.

"Yes, I was here all the time," I cry, implor-ingly, "and heard every word. I was lying on this sofa, and nothing escaped me. Of course you will never forgive me for it, but indeed I did not mean to listen."

"Oh, Phyllis!"

There is such a world of reproach in her tone that I become distracted. I move towards her and break into speech of the most incoherent descrip-tion, my words falling from me with the rapidity of desperation.

"Yes, it is true," I say. "You may look at me as if you hated me, but what was I to do? When first you came in I was in a dozy, half-sleepy sort of state, and not until you and Chandos were in the very middle of your discussion did I fully awake to the horrors of my situation. Had I declared my-

self then it surely would have been worse; and besides, I hoped, I believed you would have been kind to him at the end, and dreaded lest my unexpected appearance should put a stop to his proposal. However"—pathetically—"I suppose you will never forgive me."

"Oh, Phyllis, it is all over now," is poor Bébé's unlooked-for reply as she throws herself into my arms, with a burst of grief. She is forgetful of all but her trouble. How paltry a thing in comparison with it is my small misdemeanour!

"No, no," I reply, soothingly, patting the back of her neck, which is all I can get at. "Remember the very last thing he said, that it would be 'impossible' to forget you."

"Ah! so he said. But when he has time to reflect he will see how cold and detestable were my words. He will be glad of his escape from anyone so unloving. I myself wonder now, Phyllis, how I could have so spoken to him."

"I could have killed you as I listened," I say, vindictively. "How you brought yourself to behave so badly to the dear fellow is more than I can understand. And he looked so nice all the time, and was so delightfully in earnest! Oh, I know I would have given in long before he had time to say one-half what he said to you. Bébé, what made you so cold? I could have gone in and shaken you with all my heart."

"I wish you had," replies she, dolefully. "Yet perhaps things are better as they are. At all events, he cannot think meanly of me. I have shown him that, whatever else I may be, I am not a mere money-lover."

"Well, for all that I think it a foolish thing to cut off one's nose to vex one's face," return I, with much truth and more vulgarity.

"I am not vexing anyone," says Bébé.

"Yes, you are. You meant to vex Lord Chandos, and you succeeded. And you are vexing yourself dreadfully. And all for what? For that miserable thing called pride. Now, I never had any of that troublesome commodity about me, and I believe the want of it adds greatly to one's enjoyment."

"Had I accepted him I would have been wretched," murmurs she, with a sigh. Then, breaking down again: "And now that I have refused him I am wretched too; so there is no comfort anywhere."

"I shall always for the future hate that conservatory," exclaim I, half-crying. "And what was the use of my wishing at the Deacon's Well if this is the only answer I am to receive?"

"Was your wish about me?"

"Yes. I hoped Lord Chandos would again ask you to marry him. And see, it has happened. I forgot to wish at the same moment that you might be endowed with a little common sense. It never

occurred to me that you would be rash enough to murder your happiness a second time."

"What a good little thing you are, Phyllis, to think about it at all! Well, let us not speak of it again to-day. I do not choose he shall see me with reddened lids, like a penitent. And if I cry any more I shall have to borrow some rouge from the blooming Going to colour my pale cheeks. See, I still can laugh!"

"You will marry him yet," retort I, with conviction, refusing to notice the negative shake of the head she bestows upon me as she quits the room.

CHAPTER III.

"HARRIET, I am freezing rapidly; will you ring the bell, as you are so near it, and let us get some more coals? Tynon seems to think we require none."

Harriet withdraws her hand reluctantly from where it is lying, warm and perdu, beneath the silky Skye snoozing on her lap and does as she is bidden.

It is terribly cold. Suddenly, and without the usual gentle warning, winter has come upon us. We sit shivering around the fire, and abuse unceasingly the roaring logs because they won't roar faster.

Already my guests talk of leaving; already

countless invitations to spend the coming Christmas in the homes of others have reached Marmaduke and me. Indeed, Harriet and Bébé—whose mother does not return to England until the coming spring—will take no refusal.

Dora's marriage is arranged to come off about the middle of the ensuing month; and even now the illustrious personage who deigned to make me presentable on my entrance into fashionable life is busying herself about the *trousseau*. It seems to me a dreary month in which to celebrate a wedding, but Sir George and Dora do not see it in this light, and talk gaily of all the delights to be culled from a winter in Rome.

"Where is Lady Blanche?" I ask, suddenly awakening to the fact that for some hours I have not seen her.

"She complained of a headache shortly after the departure of the shooting party," says Dora, who is as usual tatting, "and went to her own room."

"Dear me! I hope it is nothing serious," I say, anxiously, my conscience accusing me of some slight neglect. "I thought she did look rather pale when I met her in the hall."

"I don't think you need be uneasy, dear," remarks Harriet, mildly, with a suspicious twinkle in her eyes; "Blanche's headaches *never* come to anything. Probably she will be quite herself again by dinnertime."

"Perhaps she felt a little dull—when the gentlemen were gone," suggests dear Dora, *very* innocently, without raising her white lids.

Harriet laughs maliciously, and pulls her Skye's ears and thus encouraged our gentle Dora smiles.

"It seems rude, though, not to enquire for her —does it not?" say I, with hesitation. "I think I will just run up and ask if there is nothing that I can do for her."

So saying I put down my work—a wonderful piece of imagination in the shape of a beaded collar for Tito, Bébé's fox-terrier—which ever since its arrival has evinced a decided preference for me beyond its mistress—and going upstairs knock at the door of the "round" room that Blanche occupies.

"Come in," returns her ladyship's voice, carelessly, evidently thinking she is addressing one of the domestics.

I turn the handle and enter.

At the farther end of the room, robed in a pale blue dressing-gown, richly trimmed with lace, sits Blanche—looking by no means so ill as I had expected to see her. Indeed, the clearness of her eyes and the general air of liveliness about her agree badly with her tale of a headache.

She has before her a tiny writing table, and in her hand a very elaborate pink sheet of note-paper heavily monogrammed. It is covered with close

writing, and as I open the door she is in the act of folding it. As her eyes meet mine, however, with a sudden want of presence of mind—scarcely worthy of her—she hesitates, and finally ends by putting it hastily between the leaves of her blotter.

She has flushed slightly, and looks put out. Altogether I cannot help seeing my visit is as ill-timed as it is unwelcome.

She rises to meet me, and in doing so throws a goodly amount of elegant languor into her face and form.

"I was so sorry to hear of your not feeling well," I hasten to say, as sympathetically as I can. "I came to see if I could do anything for you."

"So good of you"—with a weary smile—"so kind to take all this trouble! But, thank you, no. I am a perfect martyr to these attacks, and I find when seized with one that rest and entire freedom from conversation are my only cures. I have such a wretched head," putting her hand pathetically to her forehead. "At such times as these I am utterly useless and the worst companion possible."

"A headache must be a miserable thing," say I, thinking all the while how uncommonly well she bears hers.

"Yes," resignedly. "You never have one, I suppose?"

"Oh, never; I hardly know what it means—the sensation you speak of. I am so desperately healthy,

you see. I daresay it comes from living in the country all my life and never keeping late hours. Perhaps"—smiling—"when I get to London I shall learn all too soon."

"I hope not, for your own sake."

"I fear you will be terribly *ennuyée* up here all by yourself. If you would come down to the library it would be so much more cheerful for you. There is a good lounger there; and you need not talk unless you wish it."

"Thank you very much, but indeed I am better where I am. I hate inflicting myself upon my friends when I am so hopelessly out of spirits. Perhaps by and by—towards evening—I shall lose this feeling of heaviness. I generally do, indeed, if I remain perfectly quiet during the day. Until then, dear Mrs. Carrington, I must ask you to excuse me. But"—going back to her own seat, withdrawing the coquettish little note from its concealment, and proceeding to fold it into a cocked-hat with elaborate openness—"will you not sit down for a few minutes?"

I accept the hint.

"No indeed. I will leave you to get a little sleep, so that we may be the more sure of seeing you amongst us this evening."

Much pleased with this speech, which sounds to my own ears particularly graceful, I move towards the door and vanish.

"Well, how is she?" asks Bébé, coming upon

me unexpectedly, and speaking in a suppressed and agitated tone, as though some one were dead or dying in the next room. "Is she anything better, poor darling? Does the doctor hold out the faintest chance of her recovery? Speak, and relieve my burning anxiety."

"I don't believe she is ill at all," I return, in high disgust. "She looks perfectly well, and her colour quite as bright as ever."

"A hectic flush, dearest. I fear our sweet friend is in a bad way. How could you look at her without seeing the ravages of disease? Dear Phyllis, I doubt you are sadly wanting in discernment. What did our "stricken deer" say to you?"

"Oh, she put on an affected drawl and called herself a wretched being, and pressed her forehead tragically, and was meekly resigned in every way, and looked most provokingly healthy all the time. I know I was not half as sympathetic as I ought to have been."

Bébé breaks into merry laughter. We have turned a corner, and are on our way downstairs by this. "Look here, Phyllis," cries she: "you may take my word for it the fair Blanche is this moment in as sound health as you or I."

"But why, then, immure herself in her room and act the martyr?"

"Tired of our company probably, dear. We all understand Blanche's vapours by this. The men

have gone out, you see, not to return until dinner-hour, and women are so terribly insipid. My lady's dresses want renovating, it may be, and surely this is a capital opportunity to see to them. *Voilà tout.*"

"And could she not say so? Why tell a lie about such a trifle?"

"Blanche has a talent for lying. A pity to let it run altogether to waste, is it not? She enjoys a little mystery now and then; and besides, she would die of chagrin if she thought we knew she ever spent an hour upon the *doing up* of her things. We all have our 'little weaknesses,'" says Miss Beatoun, comically, as we enter the drawing-room.

Somehow the remembrance of that pink note and the faint confusion exhibited by Blanche Going on my entrance into her room lingers in my mind. I feel a vague dislike to that monogrammed epistle. For whom was it meant?

Off and on during the remainder of the day this question haunts me, and only a supreme effort of the will prevents my connecting with it the name of "Marmaduke."

Surely, surely I cannot be becoming that most detestable of all things, a jealous, suspicious wife!

I am unhappy and restless in spite of all my endeavours to be otherwise. I wander through the house conversing with feverish gaiety with anyone I chance to meet—longing eagerly, I scarcely know why, for the return of the sportsmen. Yet, as the

twilight falls and the shades of evening gather, instead of waiting for their coming I leave Dora in full possession of the teatray, and, quitting the drawing-room, go upstairs to pass a solitary and purposeless hour in my boudoir—the pretty little sanctum, all blue and silver, that associations have endeared to me.

Finding myself as restless here, however, as elsewhere, I leave it as the clock chimes half-past six, and, turning into the picture-gallery, begin to stare stupidly enough upon the grim cavaliers and immodest shepherdesses, who in their turn stare back at me.

Suddenly I become conscious that some cold air is blowing upon me, and raising my eyes perceive the lower window to be partly open. I shiver, and involuntarily move forward to close it. Outside this window runs a balcony, reached by stone steps from the ground beneath, and as I draw nearer to it sounds coming from thence fall upon my ears—first a woman's voice, and then a man's.

Their words, though softly uttered, are thoroughly distinct—a fragment of their conversation, unchecked by the chill wind, passes close by me and makes itself heard.

"So *you* thought *once*. You cannot yet have altogether forgotten the old times—the past memories——"

It is Blanche Going's voice, and the accent

strikes me as being reproachfully, nay, *tenderly* impassioned.

For a moment my heart stops beating. A cold dampness covers my face. I *cannot* move. I hardly dare to breathe. Oh! to whom are those words addressed? *Whose* voice will give her back an answer?

Sir Mark speaks; and, with a relief that through its intensity is for the instant acutest pain, I stagger against the wall near me and stand motionless to recover calm.

"Can anything be more melancholy than 'old times'?" murmurs Sir Mark, lightly, without the faintest trace of tenderness in his tone. "Believe me we can have no real happiness in this life until we have learned successfully how to forget."

I leave the window noiselessly, but as I go the words and their meaning follow me. "Old times"—"past memories"—can it indeed be that in the "long ago" lie love passages that once were fresh between Lady Blanche and Sir Mark Gore?

If it be so, and that the remembrance of them is not yet quite dead in *her* heart, what becomes of my theory (that of late has been a settled conviction) that she bears an overweening affection for my husband? Surely her tone was utterly sincere: she had not feigned that despairing sadness — those few words had come from a full heart—from a woman making a last vain effort to revive a buried love.

I gain my own room, and, having locked the out-

side door, stop to press my hand to my forehead. A sensation that is partly triumph, partly joy, rises within me—joy, however, that lasts but for a moment, as, with a groan, I recollect how as yet I have not proved Marmaduke's indifference to *her*.

Of what consequence is it to me to know whether Marmaduke is or is not the first in Blanche Going's thoughts, unless I be assured that *she* is not the first in *his*?

Nevertheless, in spite of these dismal doubts, I feel my spirits somewhat lighter. My feelings towards my husband take a kindlier shade as I hurry through my dressing with the assistance of my maid —being already rather late with my toilette. I hear 'Duke enter his own room. The days are long gone by when he would seek my presence the first thing on his return, and, having given me the kind and tender kiss I prized so little, proceed to tell me all that the day had brought him.

Just now this thought forces itself upon me obstinately, bringing a strange, remorseful pang to my heart. I dismiss Martha, and in an unusually softened frame of mind open the door that separates his room from mine and say, cheerfully, "Had you good sport, Marmaduke?"

He looks up plainly surprised, but makes no comment on my unexpected appearance.

"Pretty fair. Not so good as we hoped on setting

out, but very respectable for all that. Thornton is a first-class shot. Anyone here to-day?"

"Yes, the De Veres and Murrays. But they stayed no time, and old Mrs. Murray was in a very bad temper. It appears Harry is more than ever determined about marrying the governess."

"I pity the governess, if she goes back to live with the old lady as daughter-in-law."

"So do I. Oh, Marmaduke, have you got any eau de Cologne? Martha must have a weakness for it, as she never leaves me any."

"I see plenty in one of these bottles. Come and take it."

I walk in, fastening my bracelet as I go.

"That's a pretty dress you have on to-night," says Marmaduke, regarding me critically before going in for a second battle with a refractory tie—already three lie in the corner slaughtered.

"Fancy *your* seeing anything about me worth admiring!" I reply; but in spite of my words my laugh is low and pleased. His tone, though quiet, has a ring of cordiality in it that for some time has been absent. A smile hovers round my lips; I lift my head and am about to make some little, trifling, saucy, honeyed speech, when my eyes fall upon a certain object, that lies upon the toilette-table amongst the numerous other things he has just withdrawn from his pockets.

A tiny pale-pink three-cornered note rests, ad-

dress uppermost, beneath my gaze. "Marmaduke Carrington, Esq."—no more. How well I know it, the detestable, clear, beautiful writing!

I feel my lips compress, my cheeks grow ashy white. Turning abruptly, stung to the quick, I leave the room. "Will you not take the bottle with you?" calls out Marmaduke; and I answer, in rather a stifled voice, "No, thank you," and shut the door between us hastily.

Oh, that *that* was all that separated us! I feel half-mad with outraged pride and passion. That she should write him *billets-doux* in my own house, that *he* should receive them and treasure them, seems to me, in my excited state, the very basest treachery. Making fierce love beneath my very eyes, so careless of my feelings, or so convinced of my stupidity, as to take no pains to conceal their double-dealing!

I grow almost reckless, and remember with some sort of satisfaction that at least it is in my power to wound him in turn—and her, too, after what I have overheard this evening. Although his vaunted love for me—if ever there—is now gone, I can still touch him where his honour is concerned. I rub my pale face until the colour returns to it, I bite my quivering lips until they gleam like crimson berries, and, going downstairs, for the first time in my life I let the demon of coquetry rise and hold full sway within my breast while I go in for an open and decided flirtation with Sir Mark Gore.

Yet how miserable I am! How wretched are the moments, when I give myself room for thought! I note Marmaduke's dark frown, as, with flushed cheeks and gleaming, sparkling eyes, I encourage and reply gaily to Sir Mark's nonsense. I see Bébé's surprised glance and Harriet's pained one. I watch with exultation the bitter expression that clouds Lady Blanche's brow. I see everything around me, and long—with a feverish longing—for the evening to wear to an end.

At length comes the welcome hour of release. We have all wished each other "Good night." The men have retired to their smoking-room, the women to their bedroom fires and the services of their maids.

Martha having pulled my hair to pieces and brushed it vigorously, I give her leave to seek her own couch, and, with a set purpose in my mind, get through the remainder of my night-toilette without assistance.

An unrestrainable craving to learn all the particulars of Marmaduke's former attachment to Lady Blanche Going (as described by Mark Gore) seizes me; and Bébé being of all people the one most likely to satisfy my curiosity, I determine to seek her and gain from her what knowledge I can. She is, besides, the only one of whom I would make such an enquiry; therefore to her room I prepare to go.

I hastily draw on a pale blue cashmere dressing-gown, prettily trimmed with satin quilting of the

same shade, and substitute blue slippers for the black ones I have been wearing during the evening. My hair hangs in rich chestnut masses far below my waist; two or three stray rippling locks wander wantonly across my forehead. A heavy blue cord and tassel, confining my gown, completes my costume.

Leaving my own room noiselessly, I reach Bébé's, and knock softly at the door.

She too has dismissed her maid, and is sitting before the fire in an attitude that bespeaks reverie; whatever her thoughts, however, she puts them from her on my entrance and comes forward to greet me, the gay, bright *debonnaire* Bébé of every day.

"I am so glad you have come!" she says, running to take both my hands and lead me to the fire. "A few minutes" conversation at this hour of the night are worth *hours* of the day. And, oh, Phyllis, how pretty you look!"

"Nonsense!" return I, mightily pleased nevertheless; and, going over to the cheval glass, I proceed to examine myself with a critical eye.

"*Wonderfully* pretty," repeats Bébé, with emphasis. "My dearest Phyllis, you should *always* wear blue cashmere, and let your hair fall down your back just so. You look exactly fourteen, and very charming."

"Well, even at the best of times I was never considered pretty," declare I, modestly. "Now and then, when wearing a new dress or that, I may have

appeared good-looking, but even Marmaduke never told me I was *that*."

"Never told you you were *pretty!*" cries Bébé, in a voice of horror. "Never told you you were the sweetest and loveliest creature upon earth? What a *miserable* lover!" It would be impossible to describe the amount of scorn she throws into her manner.

Her words, though I know they are spoken in jest, coming thus hotly on my new suspicions, rankle sorely.

"I don't see that his telling me a lie would have done any good," I expostulate, somewhat warmly, feeling passionately aggrieved at the thought that he has fallen short in his wooing. Surely once, if for ever so little a time, I was all in all to him.

"Yes, it would—an immensity of good. It would be only fit and proper. That is just one of the things about which a man ought to be able to lie *well;* though, indeed, in most cases I doubt if it *would* be a lie. Change a friend into a lover, awaken within him the desire to make you his wife, and, such is the vanity and the self-complacency of man, he will at once (in regarding you as *his* possible property) magnify your charms, and end by contrasting you favourably with every other wife of his acquaintance. *You* do not come within the pale of my remarks, however, as I speak of ugly women. Phyllis, you are too modest. You give me the im-

pression that all your life through you have been more or less sat upon. Is it not so?"

"I believe it is," I answer, laughing; "but I think justly so. Why, only look at my nose: it turns right up; and—and then, you know, Dora was always on the spot to eclipse me."

"Indeed I know nothing of the kind. *You* are infinitely more attractive in my eyes; though I admit Dora has charms, with her complexion and eyes of 'holy blue.' I verily believe you are a hypocrite. Don't you *know* all the men here rave about you? Don't you know it was a fixed creed in the family that Marmaduke's heart was cased in steel until he destroyed it by marrying you?"

"Oh," I say, with a light laugh, though my blood is coursing wildly through my veins, "you exaggerate slightly there, I think. Was he not very much *épris* with his cousin, Lady Blanche Going, some years ago?"

"A mere boy and girl attachment. I would as soon dream of lending importance to the passion of a schoolboy in his teens—to the passion of my dear Chips, for instance. Besides, she was several years older than he was—whatever she may be now," says Bébé, with a little grimace.

"Was it violent while it lasted?"

"I don't remember anything about it; but mamma says it died a natural death after one season. Then she married Colonel Going."

"Why does Colonel Going remain away so long?"

"Ah! why, indeed, my dear—that is a thing nobody knows. There was no divorce, no formal separation, no *esclandre* of any kind; he merely put the seas between them, and is evidently determined on keeping them there. To me and my cousins of my own age the colonel is something of a myth; but mamma knew him well about six years ago, and says he was a very fascinating man, and upright, but rather stern."

"What a curiously unpleasant story! But didn't people talk?"

"Of course they did; they did even worse—they whispered; but her ladyship took no notice, and everyone had to confess she behaved beautifully on the occasion. She gave out that her extreme delicacy alone (her constitution is of iron) prevented her accompanying him to India, and she withdrew from society, in the very height of the season, for two whole months. Surely decorum could no further go!"

"And then?"

"Why, then she reappeared, with her beauty much augmented from the enforced quiet and early hours—and with her mother."

"What is the mother like? One can hardly fancy Blanche with anything so tender as a mother."

"Like a fairy godmother, minus the magic wand

and the energy of that famous person. A little old lady with a dark face, and eyes that would be keen and searching but for the discipline she has undergone. She has no opinions and no aims but what are her daughter's; and Blanche rules *her*—as she rules every other member of her household—with a rod of iron."

"Poor old creature! What an unhappy age! So you say Marmaduke's admiration for Blanche meant nothing? And she—did *she* like *him*?"

"For 'like' read 'love,' I suppose? My dearest Phyllis, have you, who have been so long under the same roof with Blanche, yet to discover how impossible it would be for her to love anyone but Blanche Going? Yet stay—I wrong her partly—*once* she *did* love, and does so still, I believe."

"Whom do you mean?" ask I, bending forward eagerly.

"Have you no notion? How surprised you look! You will wonder still more when I tell you the hero of her romance is at present in your house."

"Here, in *this* house!" I stammer.

"Yes. No less a person than Mark Gore."

So I am right. And jealousy has been at the root of all her ladyship's open hostility towards me!

"Any casual observer would never think so," I remark, at last, after a very lengthened pause.

"That is because Mark's infatuation has come to an end, and he does not care to renew matters.

If you watch him you may see what particular pains he takes to avoid a *tête-à-tête* with her. And yet there certainly was a time when she had considerable influence over him. He was a constant visitor at her house in town—so constant that at length it began to be mooted about how he had the *entrée* there at all hours and seasons, even when an intimate lady friend might expect a denial. Then people began to whisper again and shake their wise heads and pity 'that poor colonel,' and watch eagerly for the *dénouement*."

"Why did her mother not interfere?"

"My dear, have I not already told you what a perfectly drilled old lady is the mother? It would be as much as her life is worth to interfere in any of her daughter's arrangements. She is utterly dependent on Blanche, and, therefore, perforce a nonentity. She is expected to remain in the house as a useful piece of furniture; and she is also expected to have neither ears nor eyes nor tongue. Besides, it was not a singular case: Mark was only the last on a long list of admirers. My lady could not exist without a *cavalier servente*."

"I think it downright abominable," say I, with much warmth.

Bébé looks amused.

"So do I. But what will you? And in spite of all our thoughts Mark came and went unceasingly. Wherever madame appeared so did her shadow—at

every ball he was in close attendance, until, the season dragging to a close, Blanche went abroad for two or three months, and Mark went down to this part of the world. To 'Duke was it?"

"No; if you mean the summer before last, he stayed with the Leslies," I admit, somewhat unwillingly. "I met him several times."

"What! you knew him, then, before your marriage?" cries Bébé, with surprise.

"Very slightly. Once or twice he called with the Leslies, and when he returned to town he sent me an exquisite little volume of Tennyson; which delicate attention on his part so enraged papa that he put my book in the fire and forbid my writing to thank Sir Mark for it. So ended our acquaintance."

"Oh, *now* I have the secret; *now* I understand why Blanche detests you so," exclaims Bébé, clapping her hands merrily. "So he lost his heart to you, did he? And madame heard all about it, and was rightly furious? Oh, how she must have ground her pretty white teeth in impotent rage on discovering how she was outdone by a simple village maiden! I vow it is a tale that Offenbach's music might adorn."

"How absurd you are, Bébé! How you jump to conclusions! I assure you Sir Mark left our neighbourhood as heart-whole as when he came to it."

"Well, I won't dispute the point; but, whether it was your fault or not, when Blanche and he again met all was changed. His love had flown no one knew whither. He still continued to pay her visits, it is true, but not every day and all day long. He still attended the balls to which she went, but *not* as her slave. Blanche fretted and fumed herself thin at his defection; but it was no use—the spell was broken, and Mark was not to be recalled. You will think me a terrible scandalmonger," says Bébé, with a smile, "but when one hears a thing perpetually discussed one feels an interest in it at last in spite of oneself. You look shocked, Phyllis. I suppose there is no such thing in this quiet county as polite crime?"

"I don't know about the politeness, but of course there is plenty of crime. For instance, last assizes Bill Grimes, our gardener's son at Summerleas, was transported for poaching; and eight months ago John Haddon, the blacksmith, fired at his landlord; and it is a well-known fact that Mr. De Vere beats his wife dreadfully every now and then; but there are no such stories as the one you have just told to me. I think it disgraceful. What is the use of it all? How can it end?

"Sometimes in an elopement; sometimes, as in Blanche's case, in nothing. You must understand she is perfectly respectable, and that the very nicest people receive her with open arms. But then none

of them would be in the least surprised if any morning she was missing. And, indeed, sometimes I wish she *would* like somebody well enough to quit the country with him. Anything would be decenter than these perpetual intrigues."

"Oh, no, Bébé; nothing could be so bad as that. Little as I care for her, I hope I shall never hear such evil tidings of her."

"Phyllis, you are a dear charitable child, and I like you—it would be impossible for me to say how much. Do you know"—putting her hand on mine—"I have always sneered at the idea of any really sincere attachment existing between women? But since I have known you I have recanted and confessed myself in error. If you were my sister I could not love you better."

Contrasting her secretly with meek-eyed Dora, I feel guiltily that to me Bébé is the more congenial of the two. With my natural impulsiveness I throw my arms round her neck and favour her with a warm kiss.

"But I am not charitable," goes on Bébé, when she has returned my chaste salute, "and I detest Blanche with all my heart. There is something so sly and sneaking about her. She would do one an injury, if it suited her, even while accepting a kindness at one's hands. Do you know, Phyllis, she is still madly in love with Sir Mark, while I think *he* is decidedly smitten with you?"

My face and throat grow scarlet.

"I hope not," I stammer, foolishly.

"I am sure of it. He never takes his eyes off you, and at times my lady is absolutely wild. I never noticed it so plainly as this evening; and by the by, *ma mie*"—very gently and kindly—"I confess it occurred to me—were you flirting with Mark—just a little?"

"I don't know what came over me this evening," I reply, petulantly; "I hardly know what I said or did. Something was on my mind and made my actions false. I don't care a bit for Mark Gore, but still I let it seem as if I did."

"Don't make yourself unhappy by imagining absurdities," says Bébé, quietly, *à propos* of nothing that I could see, and without looking at me; "and take care of Blanche—she would make a dangerous enemy. Not that I think she could harm you; but sometimes her soft eyes betray her, and she looks as if she could cheerfully stab you. To me it is a little comedy, and I enjoy it immensely. I can see she would do anything to bring back Mark to his allegiance, and for that purpose makes love to Marmaduke before his eyes, in the vain hope of rendering him jealous. And"—with a swift, shrewd glance at me—"what can poor 'Duke do but pretend to accept her advances and be civil to her?"

I think of the pink billet and of all the other trifles light as air that go far to make me believe

the pretence to be a pleasant one for 'Duke, but say nothing. He certainly finds it more than easy to be "civil" to her.

"However, *her* pains go for naught," continues Bébé; "there is nothing so difficult to re-light as a dead love."

A shadow crosses her *piquante* face. She draws in her lips and bravely smothers a sigh. A door bangs loudly in the distance.

I start to my feet.

"It must be later than I thought," I say. "The men seem to have tired of their cigars. Good night, dear Bébé."

"Good night," she murmurs, and with a hurried embrace we part.

I gain the corridor, down one long side of which I must pass to get to my own room. Fancying, when half-way, that I hear a noise behind me, I stop to glance back and ascertain the cause; but no capped or frisetted head pushes itself out of any door to mark my doings. Some one of the indescribable noises belonging to the night has misled me.

Reassured, I turn again—to find myself face to face with Mark Gore.

He is three yards distant from me. His face wears a surprised and somewhat amused expression, that quickly changes to one deeper, as his eyes travel all over my pretty gown, my slippers, and my disordered hair.

Naturally I am covered with confusion; and, having had time to feel ashamed of my behaviour during the evening, feel how specially unfortunate is this encounter.

"Do you often indulge in midnight rambles?" he asks, gaily, stopping in front of me.

"No," I return, as unconcernedly as I well can, considering my perturbation; "but to-night Miss Beatoun and I found so much to say about our friends that we forgot the hour. Don't let me detain you, Sir Mark. Good night."

"Good night," holding out his hand, into which I am constrained to put mine. As I make a movement to go on he detains me for a moment to say quietly, "I never saw you before with your hair down. You make one lose faith in coiffeurs. And why do you not oftener wear blue?"

There is not the faintest shadow of disrespect in his tone—he speaks as though merely seeking information; and, though the flattery is openly apparent, it is not of a sort calculated to offend. Still I feel irritated and impatient.

"Fancy anyone appearing perpetually robed in the same hue!" I say, snubbily; "like the 'Woman in White' or the 'dark girl dressed in blue!'"

"You remind me of Buchanan's words," goes on Sir Mark, not taking the slightest notice of my tone. "Do you remember them?—

My hair was golden yellow, and it floated to my shoe;
My eyes were like two harebells bathed in little drops of dew."

"*My* hair golden yellow!" exclaim I, ungraciously. "Who could call it so? It is distinctly brown. I cannot say you strike me as being particularly happy in the suitability of your quotations."

All this time he has not let go my hand. He has either forgotten to do so or else it pleases him to retain it; and, as we have moved several steps apart and are at least half a yard asunder, our position would suggest to a casual observer that Sir Mark is endeavouring to keep me.

Raising my head suddenly at this juncture, I see Marmaduke coming slowly up the stairs. Our eyes meet; I blush scarlet, and, with my usual clear common sense, drag my hand in a marked and guilty manner out of my companion's. Once more I stammer "Good night" very awkwardly, and make a dart towards my own room, while Sir Mark, totally unaware of the real cause of my confusion, goes on his way, conceitedly convinced that the fascination of his manner has alone been sufficient to bring the colour to my brow.

Inside my door I literally stamp my feet with vexation. "Could anything be more provoking? What a nuisance that Sir Mark is, with his meaningless compliments! I have no patience with men, who are for ever cropping up just when they are least wanted."

"Do you know how late it is?" says Marmaduke, coming in from his dressing-room, with an ominous frown in his blue eyes.

"Yes; I was thinking what a scandalously late hour it is for you to be still up smoking," I retort, determined to fight it out, and meanly trying to make my own cause better by throwing some blame on him.

"I thought you in bed at least an hour ago."

"Well, you thought wrong. I had something particular to say to Bébé, and went to her room. That delayed me. We neither of us guessed how the time had run away until we heard the study-door close, or the smoking-room, or wherever you were. Coming out I met Sir Mark accidentally."

Though my tone is defiant I still feel I am excusing myself, and this does not sweeten my temper.

"Oh!" says Marmaduke, drily.

"Why do you speak in that tone, Marmaduke?"

"I am not aware I am using any particular tone. But I admit I most strongly object to your going up and down the corridors at this hour of night in your dressing-gown."

"You mean you disapprove of my meeting Sir Mark Gore. I could not help that. It happened unfortunately, I allow; but when the man stopped me to bid me a civil 'Good night' I could not bring myself to pass him as though he were an assassin or a midnight marauder. Of course I answered him

politely. I can see nothing improper in that, to make you scowl as you are scowling now."

"I am not talking of impropriety," says 'Duke, very haughtily. "It is *impossible* I should connect such a word with *your* conduct. Were I obliged to do so the same roof would not cover us both for half an hour longer—be assured of that."

I laugh wickedly.

"Which of us would go?" I ask. "Would you turn me out? Wait a little longer, until the frost and snow are on the ground: *then* you can do it with effect. The tale would be wanting in interest unless I perished before morning in a snow-drift. And all because I crossed a corridor at midnight in a blue dressing-gown! Poor gown! who would guess that there was so much mischief in you? Sir Mark said it was a very pretty dressing-gown."

I sink my hands in the pockets of the luckless gown and look up at 'Duke with a "now, then!" expression on my face. He is as black as night with rage. Standing opposite to him, even in my high-heeled shoes, I want quite an inch of being as tall as his shoulder, yet I defy him as coolly as though he were the pigmy and I the giant.

"I don't in the least want to know what Gore said or did not say to you," says he, in a low, suppressed voice; "keep such information to yourself. But I *forbid* you to go into Bébé's room another night so late."

"Forbid me, indeed!" cry I, indignantly. "And have *I* nothing to forbid?" (Here I think of the cocked-hat note.) "*You* may do as you like, I suppose? *You cannot* err; while *I* am to be scolded and ill-treated because I say 'Good night' to a friend. I never heard anything so unjust; and I *won't* be forbidden—so there!"

"It strikes me it must have been a *very* 'civil' good night to necessitate his holding your hand for such a length of time and to bring a blush to your cheeks."

"It was not Sir Mark made me blush," angrily.

"No? Who, then?"

"*You.*" This remark is as unwise as it is true—a discovery I make a moment later.

"Why?" asks 'Duke, sternly. "What was there in the unexpected presence of your husband to bring the blood to your face? I had no idea I was such a bugbear. It looks very much as though you were ashamed of yourself."

"Well, then—yes—I *was* ashamed of myself," I confess, with vehement petulance, tapping the ground with my foot. "I was ashamed of being caught out there *en déshabillé*, if you want to know. And now that you have made me acknowledge my crime I really do wish you would go back to your own room, Marmaduke, because you are in an awful temper, and I detest being cross-examined and

brought to task. You are ten times worse than papa and more disagreeable."

Here I give my shoulders an impertinent shrug and fairly turn my back upon him. An instant later and he has slammed the door between us, and I see him no more that night.

CHAPTER IV.

Drip, drip, drip. Patter, patter, patter. How it does rain, to be sure! If it continues pouring at this present rate, there will be but very little rain left in the clouds in half an hour.

"Just twelve o'clock," says Mr. Thornton, with a moody sigh, as he pulls out his watch for the twentieth time. "We are regularly done for if it keeps on five minutes longer, as rain at twelve means rain all day."

"Mere superstition," replies Miss Beatoun, rising to flatten her pretty nose against the window-pane, in the vain hope of catching a glimpse of the blue sky.

It is the next day; and as we have arranged to visit a skating-rink in a town some few miles from us the rain is a disappointment; especially to me, as I have never seen a rink.

"I hardly think that you will see one to-day," says Sir Mark, turning to me, with a smile.

"Seems so odd your never having seen one, dear Mrs. Carrington," says Blanche Going, sweetly, "so universal as they now are. When in Paris and passing through London I wonder you had not the curiosity to go and spend a few hours at one. Marmaduke, how very neglectful of you not to get Mrs. Carrington into Prince's!"

"Prince's is no longer the fashion," replies Marmaduke, curtly. He is sitting rather apart from the rest of us, and is looking gloomy and ill-tempered. He and I have exchanged no words since our last skirmish—have not even gone through the form of wishing each other a good day.

"It is getting worse and worse," declares Chips, from his standing-point at the window, where he has joined Miss Beatoun.

"It is always darkest before dawn," says that young lady with dauntless courage.

"So they say," murmurs Lord Chandos, catching her eye.

"Poor Thornton!" says Sir Mark, with deep sympathy, "I don't wonder at your depression—such a chance thrown away; and you always look so nice on wheels. Our friend Thornton, Mrs. Carrington, is impressed with the belief, and very justly so, that he is an unusually fascinating skater."

"Quite so," returns Chips, ironically. "I wonder what you would all do if you hadn't me to laugh at? You ought to love me: I come in so handy at

times and give you so many opportunities of showing off the brilliancy of your wit."

"He grows sarcastic," murmurs Mark. "This weather, instead of damping him, as it would more frivolous mortals, has the effect of developing his hidden powers."

"Let us forget the weather," says Bébé, brightly, turning from the contemplation of it to sink into a seat by the fire, "and then perhaps it will clear. After making up our mind to go to Warminster and visit a rink, and dine at an hotel and drive home again in the dark and have a general spree, I confess the not being able to do anything has rather put me out."

We are all assembled in the library, it being the least doleful room in the house on a wet day. As Bébé speaks we all try more or less (Marmaduke being included in the less) to put on a cheerful countenance and enter into light converse. For the most part we succeed, and almost manage to forget our troubles.

"By the by, Thornton, you used to be a great man on the Turf," presently says Sir Mark, addressing Chips, *à propos* of something that has gone before. Chips, who is lounging in a low chair beside Miss Beatoun, his whole round boyish face one cherubic smile, looks up enquiringly. "Masters told me you were quite an authority."

"Oh, not at all," returns Mr. Thornton, modestly;

"I don't pretend to anything. I flatter myself I know a likely animal when I see it—nothing more."

"I always thought you intended making your fortune in that line," continues Sir Mark, lazily. "The last time I met you, in the spring, you were radiant in the possession of so many more hundreds than you ever hoped to obtain."

"Oh! Mr. Thornton, is it possible *you* go in for betting?" murmurs Bébé, with a glance enchantingly reproachful. "I had placed you on such a high pinnacle in my estimation, and *now* what am I to think? I feel *so* disappointed."

"Don't," entreats Chips, sentimentally. "If *you* begin to think badly of me I shall do something desperate. Besides, I really only put on a mere trifle now and then—nothing at all to signify—wouldn't ruin a man if he were at it for ever. You should see how some fellows bet. Don't you know——"

"Did you do well last Ascot?" asks Chandos, in a tone that is meant to be genial.

"Well, no; not quite so well as I might wish," with a faint blush. "Fact is, I rather overdid it—risked my little all upon the die—and lost."

"Showing how natural talent has no chance against the whims of fickle fortune. Even the very knowing ones, you see, Mrs. Carrington, have to knock under sometimes," says Mark.

"How was it?" I ask Chips, with a smile.

"Oh! it was a beastly shame," responds that young man. "The horse would have won in a walk if he had got fair play. It was the most outrageous transaction altogether. If the rider had gone straight, there was not an animal in the running could have beaten him. It was the clearest case of pulling you ever saw."

Lady Blanche laughs softly.

"I never knew an unsuccessful better who didn't say that," she says. "I was waiting to hear you. Each man believes the horse he fancies *would* have won only for something. They would die rather than confess themselves ignorant."

"But I always thought everything was fair and aboveboard on a racecourse," observes Harriet.

Thornton roars.

"Lady Handcock, you are the most charitable woman alive," he cries, gaily; "but I fear in this instance your faith in the goodness of humanity goes too far. I met Hamilton the other day, and he told me a capital story *à propos* of racing honour. You know Hamilton, Chandos?"

"Yes, I think so—middle-sized man, with a fair beard?"

"What a vivid description!" murmurs Miss Beatoun, demurely. "One so *seldom* sees a middle-sized man, with a fair beard!"

Chandos glances at her quickly, rather amused, I think, by her impertinence; but her eyes are in-

nocently fixed on Thornton, who is evidently full of his story.

"Go on, Thornton," says Sir Mark, blandly; "we are all miserable till we learn what befell your friend Hamilton."

"It was at Fairy House races, last year," begins Chips, nothing daunted. "Hamilton was over in Dublin at the time, and went down there to back a horse he knew something about. A rather safe thing it was, if rightly done by; and, knowing the jock, who was a devoted adherent of his own, he went up to him on the course, to know if he might put his money on with any chance of success. 'Wait a while, Misther H.,' says his ingenuous friend, turning a straw in his mouth with much deliberation, 'an' I'll tell ye. Come to me again in ten minutes.' Accordingly in ten minutes Hamilton, seeing him in the Paddock, dressed and mounted, went to him again. 'Well?' said he. 'Wait yet another little bit, Misther H.,' says this imperturbable gentleman; 'the instructions ain't final. Meet me in five minutes at that post,' indicating a certain spot. So Hamilton met him there, and for the third time asked him impatiently if he meant winning. 'I *do*, Misther H.,' says he, in a mysterious whisper, '*if the reins break!*'"

We all laugh heartily, and Bébé, while declaring the story delicious, vows she has lost all faith in mankind for evermore.

"I have *not*," stoutly maintains Harriet. "Of course there must be exceptions, but I believe there is a great deal of goodness amongst us all in spite of popular opinion. Why do you look so supercilious, Marmaduke? Don't you agree with me?"

"No, I do not," replies 'Duke, promptly. "I think there is very little *real* goodness going. Taking the general mass, I believe them to be all alike bad. Of course there is a great deal in training, and some appear better than others, simply because they are afraid of being found out. That is the principal sin in this life. I don't deny that here and there one finds two or three whose nature is tinged with the divine; these reach nearer the heavens, and are the exceptions that prove my rule."

"My dear 'Duke, how shockingly uncharitable!" says his sister, slowly; while I, gazing on my husband with open-eyed amazement, wonder vaguely if last night's disturbance has occasioned this outbreak.

"It is uncharitable *always* to speak the truth," says 'Duke, with a faint sneer. "You asked me my opinion, and I gave it. Are you acquainted with many beautiful characters, Harry? I confess I know none. Selfishness is our predominant quality; and many of the so-called religious ones amongst us are those most deeply impregnated with this vice. They follow their religion through fear, not love, because

they dread consequences, and object to being uncomfortable hereafter, so do what their hearts loathe through mere selfish terror."

"I had no idea you could be so eloquent," laughs Lady Blanche, mockingly, from her low seat. "Pray go on, Marmaduke; I could listen to you for ever. You are positively refreshing after so much amiability."

"My dear fellow, you grow bearish," expostulates Sir Mark, with raised brows and an amused glance. "We wither beneath your words. Abuse yourself as much as you please, but *do* spare the rest of us. We like to think ourselves perfection—it is very rude of you to undeceive us so brusquely. And how can you give utterance to such sweeping assertions in such company? Have you forgotten your wife is present?"

"No"—with a forced smile—"I have not. But I fear even Mrs. Carrington cannot be considered altogether harmless." He points this remark with a curiously unloving expression cast in my direction.

"Never mind, Mrs. Carrington," exclaims Thornton, with his usual vivacity. "At all events you may count upon *one* devoted admirer, as I, for my part, do not believe you have a fault in the world."

"Thank you," I answer, gaily, though secretly I am enraged at Marmaduke's look and tone. "Thank you very much, Mr. Thornton. I consider myself fortunate in having secured your good opinion. But,

Marmaduke"—addressing him with the utmost coolness—"how uncivil you can be! I say nothing of my own feelings—I know I am hopelessly wicked; but your guests, what must *they* think? Take Lady Blanche, for instance—is she not looking the very picture of innocence, though no doubt speechless with indignation? Surely you will exonerate *her*?"

"No, not even Blanche," replies Marmaduke; but even as he condemns her he bends upon her one of his very sweetest smiles.

"I am the more pleased that you do not," says her ladyship, in her low, soft tones, returning his glance fourfold. "Even if it were possible I would not be altogether good. Perfection in any shape is the one thing of which we soonest tire."

"The day is clearing; the rain has almost ceased," announces Lord Chandos, solemnly, at this moment.

I spring to my feet.

"No!" cry I, "you don't *mean* it?"

"I am almost sure I do," replies he, sententiously.

And there, indeed, amid the clouds as I run to look at them, shines out a dazzling piece of blue sky that grows and widens as I gaze.

"It still wants a quarter to one," I say, rapidly. "We will have lunch at once—no matter whether we eat it or not—and then we shall start for Warminster, and I shall see my rink after all. But first

I must go to the gardens. Sir Mark"—in a coquettishly appealing tone, casting at him a very friendly glance from my grey-blue eyes—"will *you* come with me and take care of me as far as the gates? I have something *very* particular to say to—Cummins."

I make the little pause maliciously, and raise my long lashes just so much as permits me to obtain a glimpse of Marmaduke.

He is talking pleasantly to Lady Blanche, and evidently means me to understand he is ignorant of my conduct. But I can see a frown on his forehead and certain lines about his mouth that tell me plainly he has both seen and heard and condemned, and I am satisfied.

"I shall be delighted," says Sir Mark, with prudent coldness, and together we leave the room.

. . . . .

An hour later—lunch is over, and I am rushing up the stairs to don my walking attire. On the topmost landing stands Bébé, already dressed, and about to descend.

As I meet her gaze it arrests me. Surely some expression that closely resembles woe characterises her face. Her eyebrows are slightly elevated, her lips at the corners curving downwards; her cheeks are innocent of nature's rouge; a suspicious pinkness rests upon her lids.

Dear—dear—*dear!* is there nothing but trouble

in this world? I, of course, am wretched—that goes without telling—but pretty, bright, *piquante* Bébé, must she too be miserable? What untoward thing can have occurred to bring that wistful look into her eyes?

Turning to my maid, who is following me at a respectful distance, I speak aloud—

"Martha, I will dispense with your services this afternoon. Miss Beatoun is here, and will give me any assistance I may require."

So saying I draw my friend into my room and close the door.

"Now, Bébé, what is it?" I ask, pushing her into a lounging-chair, and beginning a vigorous search for my sealskin jacket. Martha is a good girl—the best of girls, but she never can put anything in the same place twice running.

"Oh, it is nothing—nothing," answers Bébé, in a tone almost comical in its disgust. "My pride has had a slight fall—my conceit has been a little lowered—no more. I hate myself" (with a petulant stamp of the foot) "for taking it so much to heart; but I *do*, and that is the fact, and I cannot yet overcome the feeling. If I did not know I must have looked like a foolish culprit all the while I think I would not so greatly mind; but my colour was coming and going in a maddening fashion; and then his tone—so quick—so——"

"Chandos' tone, I suppose you mean? But you forget, dear—I know nothing."

"True—of course not. Well, after you left the library that time with Mark the whole party broke up and dispersed about the house to prepare for this drive, all except myself. I stayed on—unluckily, as it turned out—to finish my novel, until I should be called to lunch. It interested me, and I thought myself sure of solitude for a little time, but in less than three minutes the door was reopened and Chandos came in."

"Well?" I say, as she makes a long pause.

"Unfortunately it struck me that his coming back so soon again to where he knew I was alone looked, you know, rather particular—as if he wished to say something private to me, and—I had no desire to hear it."

"Oh, Bébé!"

"Well, believe me or not, as you will, I really dreaded his saying anything on the—old topic—to such a degree that I rose and made as though I would instantly quit the room. Oh!" cries she, with an irrestrainable blush and movement of the hand, "I wish I had died before I did *that*."

"Why, darling?"

"Oh! need you ask? Don't you see how it betrayed my thoughts? Why, it looked as though I made quite sure he was going to propose again. Can't you understand how horrible it was?" says

Bébé, burying her face in her hands, with an hysterical laugh. "*He* understood it so, at all events. He stopped right before me and said deliberately, with his eyes fixed on mine, 'Why do you leave the room? I came for a book, and for nothing else, I assure you.' Thus taken aback, I actually stammered and blushed like a ridiculous schoolgirl, and said, weakly, 'It is almost time to think of dressing. We start so soon. And besides—I——' Could anything be more foolish? 'One would think I had the plague or the pestilence, the way you rush from a room the moment I enter it,' says he impatiently. 'I swear I am not going to propose again. I have had enough of it. I have no desire whatever to marry a woman against her will. I asked you to be my wife, for the second time, a week or two ago, thinking my poverty had been the cause of your former refusal, and was justly punished for my conceit. Believe me I have brains enough to retain a lesson, once I have learned it; so you may sit down, Miss Beatoun, with the certainty that I shall never again offend you in *that* way.' I could never tell you how I felt, Phyllis, during the utterance of these words. My very blood was tingling with shame. My eyes would not be lifted; and besides, they were full of tears. I felt that I hated both myself and him."

"It was a very curious speech for him to make," say I, feeling both puzzled and indignant with Chandos.

"I think he was quite right," declares she, veering round to resent what seems like an attack on my part. "It must have angered and disgusted him to see me so confident of his lasting affection as to imagine him ready to make a fresh offer every time people left us *tête-à-tête*. I think any man with spirit would have done just so. No one is to be blamed but myself."

"On the other hand, why should he conclude you thought anything of the sort?" I say, defending her stoutly in spite of herself. "He only proved the idea to be quite as uppermost in his mind as it was in yours. I would have said something to that effect had I been you."

"*Said*, my dear! I could not have even *thought* of anything at the moment, I was so confused. It is the simplest thing possible to think of what would have been the correct thing to say, and to make up neat little speeches, half an hour after the opportunity for uttering them is past, but just on the instant how few have presence of mind!"

"It was provoking," say I, "and"—with an irrepressible little laugh—"funny too. My own impression is he *did* come back to renew his pleading, but saw by your manner it would be useless. Pity you did not insist on knowing the title of the book he was so anxious to procure. At all events it is nothing to be miserable about, dear Bébé."

"Oh, I shan't be miserable either. Now that I

have told some one I feel better. I have had a good cry, brought on by thorough vexation, and will now dismiss both the occurrence and his lordship from my mind."

"Shall you find that an easy task? The latter part of it, I mean?"

"Quite easy—nothing more so," replies she, with a saucy uplifting of her chin as she leaves me.

As the hat I wish to wear has been locked away in a certain part of a wardrobe where I am certain no hat was ever stowed before it takes me some time to discover it. When at length I do so I find I am considerably behind time, and, catching up my gloves, run hastily along the gallery, and down the western corridor, that will bring me a degree sooner to the hall below.

As I turn the corner I come without any warning upon Marmaduke and Lady Blanche Going, evidently in deep and interesting converse. I stop short; and both, looking up, see me.

Rage and indignation fill me at this unexpected rencontre. What *can* this woman have to whisper to my husband that might not be said in public?

Blanche with the utmost composure nods her head, smiles, and vanishes down the staircase, leaving me alone with Marmaduke; while he stands frowning heavily, and apparently much annoyed by what has just been said. His black looks deepen as his eyes meet mine; but as, with raised head

and haughty lips, I pass him by he suddenly moves towards me, and, throwing his arms round me, strains me passionately to him, and turning up my face, kisses me twice, thrice upon my mouth.

Still smarting under my angry thoughts, I tear myself from his embrace and stand aloof, panting with mortification.

"How dare you?" I gasp. "Don't attempt to touch me."

"What! has your indifference *already* changed to hatred!" says he, bitterly, as I walk rapidly away.

. . . . .

The sun shines out with redoubled power and brilliancy, and, tooling up Carlisle Street, we find ourselves before the door of the principal hotel in Warminster. Such a goodly turn-out as ours is seldom seen even in this busy, bustling town, and the waiters and ostlers come out to admire and tender their services. To the enterprising owner of this grand hotel belongs the rink, and thither we bend our footsteps.

To see the world on wheels—to see the latest, newest vanity of the Great Fair, is my ambition. Turning a corner we enter a gateway adjoining the hotel; we pass the mystic portal, we pay the inevitable shilling, throw ourselves upon the mercies of the movable barrier, and find ourselves *there*.

Just at first the outside circle of admirers pre-

vents our catching sight of the performers, and the dull grating noise of the machines falls unpleasantly upon our ears. We draw nearer the chattering, gaping crowd, and by degrees edge our way in, until we too have a full view of all that is to be seen.

Surely there is a mistake somewhere, and it is "wheels, wheels, wheels," *not* "love," that "makes the world go round!"

On they come, by twos and threes, in single file, in shaking groups, all equally important, all filled with a desire to get—nowhere. A novice comes running, staggering, balancing towards us; evidently her acquaintance with this new mode of locomotion was of the vaguest half an hour ago. The crowd passes on, and she must follow it; so, with a look of fear upon her face that amounts almost to agony, she totters onward to brave a thousand falls. A sudden rush past her—the faintest touch does it—she reels; her heels (that on ordinary occasions, to judge by their appearance, must be the staunchest of supports) refuse to uphold her now; her lips part to emit a dying gasp—already she smells the ground, when a kindly hand from behind seizes her, steadies her with good-natured force, and, with a smile of acknowledgment, that confesses the misery of the foregoing minutes, she once more totters, trips, and scrambles to her fate.

I am delighted, entranced. I find myself presently laughing gaily and with all my heart, the

galling remembrances of the last few hours swept completely from my brain. I cry "Oh!" at every casualty and grasp my companion's arm—I admire and smile upon the successful. I begin to wish that I too could skate.

Here comes the adept, with eyes fixed questioningly upon the watchful crowd. Their approving glances fire him with a mad desire to prove to them how superior he is to his compeers. He will do *more* than skate with consummate grace and ease—he will do better than the "outside edge"—he will *waltz!*

Oh, daring thought! Now shall he bring down the well-deserved plaudits of the lookers-on. He turns—one, two, three—it is a swing, a hop—not perhaps a ballroom performance, but at least a success. Eyes become concentrated. He essays it again, and again victory crowns his effort. Yet a third time he makes the attempt—alas! that fatal three. Is it that his heel catches his toe, or his toe catches his heel? The result at least is the same: over he goes—disgrace is on him—with a crash he and the asphalte meet.

"It is monotonous, I think," breathes Sir Mark in my ear, in a deprecating tone, and then looks past me at Bébé.

"It is fatiguing," murmurs Harriet, with a yawn. "James, if you don't get me a chair this instant I shall faint."

"It is delicious," declare I, enthusiastically; "it is the nicest thing I ever saw. Oh! I wish *I* could skate."

"It makes one giddy," says Lady Blanche, affectedly. "Do they never turn in this place?" Almost on her words a bell tinkles somewhere in the distance, and as if by magic they all swerve round and move the contrary way—all, that is, except the tyros, who come heavily, and without a moment's warning, to their knees.

And now the band strikes up and the last fashionable waltz comes lingeringly to our ears. Insensibly the musical portion of the community on wheels falls into a gentle swinging motion and undulate to the liquid strains of the tender "Manolo."

"This is better," says Lady Handcock, sinking into the chair for which her faithful James has just done battle.

Bébé and Thornton, hand-in-hand, skim past us.

"Oh! I must, I *will* learn," I cry, excitedly. "I never saw anything I liked so much. Sir Mark, *do* get me a pair of skates and let me try. It *looks* quite simple. Oh, if Billy were but here!"

Sir Mark goes to obey my command, and I stand by Harriet's chair, too interested for conversation. How they fly along! the women with more grace in their movements, the men with more science. Here is the fatal corner turn; the numbers are increasing—whirr, crash down they come,

four together, causing an indescribable scene of confusion. Two from the outside circle rush in to succour their fallen darlings. It is a panic—a *mêlée*. Yet stay, after all it is nothing—they are up again, flushed but undaunted—it is all the fortune of war. *Vogue la galère!*

A tall young man, blonde and slight, attracts my notice. Half an hour ago he struck me as being the gayest of the gay, now his expression, as he slowly wends his way through the skaters, is sad and careworn in the extreme; the terrors of the rink are oppressing him sore, anxiety is printed on his brow; he has but one thought from start to finish—how to reach uninjured the chair he has just left. He never takes but one turn at a time round the arena, and never gains his haven of safety without a longdrawn sigh of relief. The fear of ridicule lies heavy upon him. But what will you? Rinking is the fashion, and for what does a young man live if not to follow the *mode?*

I see, too, the elderly gentleman who, with bent knees and compressed mouth, essays to rival his juniors. He *will* be young, and he *will* skate, whether his doctor "will let him or no." *Vive la jeunesse!*

La jeunesse, in the form of a diminutive damsel, follows closely in his wake; she is of tiny build, and has her hand clasped by one of the tallest young men it has ever been my luck to behold.

"I pity that young man," says Harriet. "Titania has secured him for her own."

And indeed it seems like it. Where she may choose to lead him for the next hour there must he surely go. Were he dying to leave her, to join some other, "nearer and dearer," he will not be able to do so. Can he act the brute and ask her to sit down before she shows any inclination so to do? Can he feign fatigue when she betrays no symptoms of flagging, and regards him with a glance fresh as when first they started? He must only groan and suffer patiently, even though he knows the demon of jealousy is working mischief in the heart of his beloved as she sits silently watching him from a distant corner.

"What wonderful vitality that small creature develops!" says Harriet. "Probably, at home, if asked to rise twice from her chair, she would declare herself fatigued and *ennuyée* to the last degree; here she keeps in motion for an hour at a stretch, and is still smiling and radiant."

"The game seems hardly worth the candle," remarks Sir James, gazing after Titania's very insipid-looking cavalier.

"My dear, it is worth ten thousand candles," returns his wife. "That is young Woodleigh, and you know he came in for all that money on his uncle's death. In such a cause you would not have her countenance fatigue?"

"Here comes her contrast," remarks Sir James, as a slight, dark woman, very pretty, with just a *soupçon* of colouring on her pale cheeks and enough shading round her lids to make her dark eyes darker, skates by.

"I have been watching her," says Harriet. "She is Mrs. Elton, whose husband died last year—much to her satisfaction, as people say. See, Phyllis, how she is surrounded by admirers; every tenth minute she accepts a new aspirant to her hand, as far as rinking goes. Ah, my dear, see what it is to be a bewitching widow,—far better than being a lovely girl. And James positively refuses to give me a chance of trying whether I would be a success if so circumstanced."

Sir James smiles comfortably, and so do I, while watching the gay widow as she beams and droops and languishes, according to the mood of each companion; amusing all in turn, and knowing herself as universally adored by the opposite sex as she is detested by her own.

"I had great difficulty in getting your skates. I wonder if these are small enough?" whispers Sir Mark in my ear; and turning, I behold him fully equipped for the fray, followed by a subdued little boy, who carries under his arm the articles in question. They prove to be the right size, and soon I find myself standing on four wheels (that apparently

go every way in the most impartial manner), grasping frantically my Mentor's arm.

"Oh, what is the matter with my heels? They won't stay still," I cry, desperately, as my body betrays an inclination to lay itself flat upon the ground. "They can't be right, I am sure. Are all the skates like these?"

"Yes. Try to walk a little, and you will find it easier. It is wonderful how soon one gets used to the sensation."

I summon all my pluck and get round the place three times without stopping or falling, thanks to Sir Mark's strong arm. As I reach my starting-point once more I pause and sink into a vacant chair.

"I will rest a little," I breathe hastily. "I am dreadfully tired and frightened. I had no idea it would prove so difficult. Go away, Sir Mark, and take a turn by yourself; and perhaps later on, if you come back for me, I will try again. Oh, I wonder how on earth it is all these people manage to keep upright?"

"Don't lose heart," says Sir Mark, smiling. "Once on a time they all felt just as you do now. Indeed, I think you a very promising beginner."

He leaves us, and Harriet and I fall to criticising the performers again. After all I think the beginners amuse me most, more especially *now*, when I can "deeply sympathise" with their terrors.

The way they stumble against each other, their frequent falls, their earnest faces—earnest as though it were a matter of life and death in which they are engaged—all combine to excite my risible faculties to the last degree.

I laugh merrily and heartily, my colour rises, I clap my hands with glee as two fat men, coming into collision, fall prostrate almost at my feet.

"How you enjoy everything!" says Harriet, patting me on the shoulder and laughing herself through sympathy.

"It is all so new to me," I return, with delight; and, glancing up at her, I also catch Sir James' eyes fixed upon me, filled with pleased amusement.

There are little boys with spindle legs who look all boots and no body—little boy-rinkers and little girl-rinkers, who do their work so beautifully and show such unlimited *go* as puts their elders to shame.

Sir Mark comes back again, and again I am persuaded to rise and court fortune. In my turn I scramble and totter and push and try to believe I am enjoying the moment. At length I break into a little slide—insensibly, as it seems—and after that matters go more smoothly.

"Ah! now you are getting into the way of it," exclaims Sir Mark, almost growing excited over my progress. "Just keep on like that, and soon you will master it."

Half an hour elapses. The others of our party, who have been at it longer than I have, and to whom it is no novelty, have tired of skating and stand once more together in a group.

As I approach them, attended by Sir Mark, I pause to utter a few words.

"It is lovely, delicious. I am getting on capitally. I shall do it perfectly in no time," I gasp, conceitedly; and, instantly slipping, I fall forward helplessly into my companion's arms.

I get a severe shock, but think myself lucky in that I have escaped the ground.

Sir Mark holds me a shade longer, and perhaps a shade more tenderly, than the occasion requires; and, looking up, I catch Blanche Going's eyes, and can see that she wears upon her handsome face a smile, half insolent, wholly suspicious. The others must see it too.

Extreme anger grows within my breast. Disengaging myself from Sir Mark's support, I stand alone, though insecure, and feel that I am rapidly becoming the colour of a rich and full-blown peony. Certainly my bitterest enemy could not accuse me of blushing prettily; and this knowledge, added to what I am already smarting under, renders me furious.

I repent my first move. I regret having so far given in to popular opinion as to withdraw myself from Sir Mark's sustaining arm. Hastily turning to

him again—unmindful of Harriet's kind little speech—I hold out to him my hand, and address him with unwonted *empressement*.

"Thank you," I say: "but for you I should have come to ignominious grief in the very midst of my boasting. I am in your debt, remember. Will you add to your goodness by taking my hand yet again for a round or two? I want to be a degree more assured. It is not every day," I add, with a gay, coquettish laugh, "a lady will make you a generous offer of her hand."

Marmaduke, as well as Blanche, hears every word. Sir Mark takes my hand very readily, and together we vanish out of sight.

As usual, once my naughtiness is a *fait accompli*, I suffer from remorse. When next I find myself near 'Duke I am mild and submissive as a ringdove. Would he but speak to me now I feel I could pardon and be pardoned with the utmost cheerfulness. Alas! he remains mute and apparently unforgiving, being in the dark as to my softened mood.

A deep curiosity to learn his exact humour towards me seizes hold of me, and for the satisfying of it I determine to open fire and be the first to break down the barrier of silence that has risen between us.

"What a pity we must leave this place so soon!" I say, with exceeding geniality. "It opens again at half-past seven. If we do not start for home, 'Duke,

until ten o'clock, why should we not spend another hour here after dinner?"

"At that hour the place will be thronged with shopkeepers and the townsfolk generally," replies he, in his coldest tones, without looking at me.

"I should not mind them in the very least," eagerly.

"I dare say not. There are few things you *do* mind; but *I* should," returns 'Duke, slowly and decisively; and, walking away, leaves me *tête-à-tête* with Sir Mark Gore.

All the sweetness within me changes to gall. I am once again angered and embittered; nay, more, I long to revenge myself upon him for the severity of his manner. At such moments who has not found the tempter near?

Sir Mark, bending his head, says smoothly, "You should remember how tired Marmaduke must be of this kind of thing. He has seen so much of it. It was good enough of him, I think, to drive here today at all. No doubt he shudders at the thought of visiting a country rink twice in six or seven hours. Will you allow *me* to be your escort here to night? If it proves unbearable we need only stay a few minutes. I am sure Marmaduke would in reality wish you to be gratified——"

He hesitates, and regards me quietly. I am by no means as sure as he is of Marmaduke's amiability; but at this instant I care for nothing but the

opportunity of showing my husband how little I regard his likes or dislikes.

"I daresay you are right," I return, calmly. "Of course it is just the sort of amusement a man would find dull, once the novelty was worn away. It is self-denying of you to offer your services. Yes, I think I will come here to-night for a few minutes, if only to see how the scene looks by lamplight."

"Much gayer than by daylight. That you can imagine," replies he, evenly, his eyes bent upon the ground.

Once having pledged myself to go, I feel no inclination to break my word. All through dinner mutinous thoughts support me in my determination.

Having led my guests back into the reception room, I pass into the adjoining apartment unnoticed, and, hurriedly putting on my hat and jacket, slip out into the hall, where I find Sir Mark awaiting me.

Now for the first time, looking out into the darkening night, I understand what fear means. My heart sinks. What wild and foolish thing am I about to do? Obstinacy and the shame of confessing myself unnerved alone prevent me from turning back again, and it is with a beating, cowardly pulse, though an undaunted exterior, that I cross the threshold with my companion.

As I have said, the rink adjoins the hotel, and a very few minutes bring us once more within its

shelter. During those few minute my usual talkativeness deserts me—I am silent as the grave. Sir Mark, too, makes no attempt at conversation.

Inside, the laughing, moving crowd somewhat distracts me from my gloomy apprehensions. The bright glare of the lamps, the music of the band, which is playing its liveliest air, renders me less fearful of consequences. Sir Mark gets me a pair of skates; he holds out his hand; I move forward—the crush is not so great as I had imagined—the music cheers me. After all what harm have I done? I stumble; a merry laugh forces itself from my lips; all is forgotten save the interest of this new pastime.

Can a quarter of an hour have passed away? I am chattering gaily, and clinging to my cavalier, in a fashion innocent, indeed, but rather pronounced, when, looking up, I encounter Marmaduke's eyes fixed upon me from the doorway. There is in them an expression strange and, to me at least, new —an expression that strikes terror to my heart as I gaze.

Sir Mark, unaware of his presence, continues to issue instructions and guide my quavering footsteps until we are within a few feet of my husband. Loosing my hands then from his grasp, I precipitate myself upon Marmaduke and cling to him for the support he coolly allows me to take.

Sir Mark, propelled by the push I have given

him in parting, skates on some little distance from us, giving me time to gasp, "Oh, 'Duke, don't be angry. I liked it so much to-day, and you said we would not start before ten; so I knew I had plenty of time. You are not angry, are you?"

By this time—before 'Duke can reply—if, indeed, he would deign to notice me, which I begin to doubt—Sir Mark is returned, and is now addressing my husband with the utmost *bonhomie*.

"See what it is to be of a dissipated turn, Carrington. In default of more congenial sport I could not resist the pleasures of an obscure rink. I fear it was foolish of me, though, to put it into Mrs. Carrington's head; though I really think there are few draughts anywhere, it is such a lovely night."

He says this as though the only earthly objection that could be raised to my coming out at this hour with him alone is the fear of my catching cold.

"Don't you think you have had enough of it now?" says 'Duke, calmly—*too* calmly—still with that strange expression in his eyes, though perfectly polite. He does not look at me, and the hand I still hold in desperation is limp within my grasp, and takes no heed of the gentle, beseeching pressure I bestow upon it every quarter of a minute. "It is getting rather late"—glancing at his watch—"I fear I must ask you to return at once, as the traps are ordered round; and it will not do for Mrs. Carrington to keep her guests waiting."

"I want a boy to take off my skates," I say, submissively, shocked at the lateness of the hour—it wants but ten minutes to ten.

"True. But boys are never in the way when wanted. Gore, I am sure *you* will not mind unfastening Mrs. Carrington's skates, just for once," in a queer voice.

"I shall be delighted," says Mark, courteously, going down on his knees before me. As he bows his head I barely catch a certain gleam in his eyes that is neither laughter nor triumph, yet is a curious mingling of both.

I feel ready to cry with vexation.

"You will follow me as soon as you can," says 'Duke; and, to my amazement, walks steadily away.

"I am afraid I have got you into a scrape," says Mark, in a low tone, as he bends over my left foot and with slow fingers draws out the leather straps.

"How do you mean?" I ask, haughtily, feeling passionate anger in my heart towards him at the moment, regarding him as the cause of all my misery.

"I mean—of course I don't know—but I fancied Carrington was angry with you for coming here with—that is—so late." His hesitation and stammering are both affected and untrue.

"Not a bit of it," I reply, stoutly; "he probably does not like being kept waiting—men never do.

He is wonderfully punctual himself, and of course I ought to have been back ages ago. I wish now I had never come. Can't you be a little quicker?" with an impatient movement of my toe. "It don't take the boys hours to get off each skate."

"You are in a desperate hurry *now*."

"I *am* in a desperate hurry, and I hate vexing Marmaduke. There, hold it tightly, and I will pull my foot out. Now, try and be a little quicker about this one."

"I assure you I am doing my best," sulkily. "I don't want to keep you here, in your present mood, longer than I can help."

"I should think not," say I, with a disagreeable laugh.

As the skate comes off he flings it aside with a savage gesture, and, rising, offers me his arm, which I decline.

"We must run for it," I say, indifferently, "and I never can do that to my own satisfaction when holding on to anyone. I detest jogging."

"Why don't you say at once you detest *me*?" exclaims Sir Mark, roughly, and summarily disposes of a small boy who is unhappy enough to be in his path at the moment.

"I will if you like," return I, equably; and in silence as complete as when we set out we return to the hotel.

When we arrive everyone is busy getting on his

or her outdoor things. My sealskin jacket and velvet hat already adorn my person, so no convenient business of that kind comes to my aid to help me to carry off the confusion and secret fear that is consuming me. I stand somewhat apart from the rest looking strangely like a culprit. Even Bébé, who is a sure partisan, is so standing before a distant mirror adjusting the most coquettish of head-gears as to be unable to see me, while young Thornton chatters to her admiringly upon one side, and Lord Chandos glowers at her from the other.

Presently somebody approaches, and to my astonishment Sir James Handcock, with an unusual amount of energy in his eyes and manner, takes up a position near me, and actually volunteers a remark.

"Remember I am old enough to be your father," he begins, abruptly, "and don't be angry with me. I feel that I must speak. I don't want to see you made unhappy. I want you to cut the whole thing. Flirtations, however innocent, were never meant for tender-hearted little girls like you."

I am so utterly taken aback, so altogether surprised, that I even forget to blush, and can do nothing but stand staring at him in silent bewilderment. Sir James to deliver a lecture! Sir James to take upon him the part of Mentor! is more than my brain can grasp at a moment's notice. Surely I

have been guilty of something horrible, unpardonable, to shake him out of his taciturnity!

Harriet, coming up at this juncture, hastens to assist me out of my dilemma.

"Has he been scolding you?" she asks, briskly, with her quick ready smile. "James, I won't have Phyllis frightened to death by a stern old moralist like you. Go and get things together; and if you meet a comfortable motherly grey shawl, remember it is mine."

Thus dismissed, James ever obedient, departs, casting a kindly glance at me as he goes. Harriet lays her hand lightly on my arm.

"Don't look so horrified, child," she says. "James's voice, from continual disuse, has degenerated into a growl, I own, but it need not reduce you to insensibility. He is awkward, but he means well, as they say in the British drama. Come"—with a faint pressure—"try to look more cheerful, or people will begin to wonder and imagine all sorts of unlikely things. You have made a mistake; but then a mistake is not a crime."

"What have I done?" I ask, rousing myself. "I only wanted to see the rink again, and 'Duke would not take me. He was unkind in his manner, and vexed me. Sir Mark offered to take charge of me. I believe I wanted to show 'Duke I could go in spite of him, but I never thought of—of anything

else; and now 'Duke is so angry he will not even speak to me."

"Oh, that is nonsense—of course he will speak to you. You have committed a little folly, that is all. I can quite understand it. Probably, under like circumstances, and at your age, I would have been guilty of the same. But it was foolish nevertheless."

"He should not have spoken to me as he did."

"I daresay not; though I don't know what he said, and do not wish to know. There are always faults on both sides. And now, Phyllis, as we are on the subject, let me say one word. You know I am fond of you—that I think you the dearest little sister-in-law in the world. Therefore you will hear me patiently. Have nothing more to say to Mark Gore. He is very—unfortunate in his—friendships. I do not wish to say anything against him, but no good ever came of being too intimate with him. Are you offended with me? Have I gone too far, Phyllis?"

"No, no," anxiously retaining the hand she half-withdraws, "I am glad, as it was on your mind, you spoke. But you cannot think—you cannot believe——" I am too deeply agitated to continue.

"I believe nothing but what is altogether good of you—be sure of that," she answers, heartily. "But I dread your causing yourself any pain through

thoughtlessness. Remember 'how easily things go wrong,' and how difficult it is sometimes to set them right again. And—Marmaduke loves you."

"I wish I had never seen this odious rink," I whisper, passionately. "I will never go to one again. I wish I had never laid eyes on Mark Gore. I hate him. I——"

"Good child," interposes she, calmly, as an antidote to my excitement. "Now, go and make your peace with your husband. See, there he is. Marmaduke, Phyllis is too cold in this coat; get her something warm to put round her shoulders."

Mechanically I obey the faint push she gives me and follow 'Duke into the dimly-lighted hall. He strides on in front, and takes not the slightest notice of my faltering footsteps.

"Marmaduke," I whisper, nervously, "Marmaduke, may I drive home with you?"

"With me! For what?"

His tone is stern and uncompromising. My newfound courage evaporates.

"Because I—I want to—very much," I answer, feebly, much dispirited.

"You came here with Gore. Why not return with him? It seems to me far better for all parties you should do so."

"But I do not wish it. I would rather drive home with anyone than Sir Mark Gore. Oh, Marmaduke! please let me go with you."

"It is rather late to think of saving appearances, if you mean that."

"I do not mean it. I am not thinking of anything but you."

He laughs unpleasantly.

"Did Harriet tell you to make that sweet little speech?"

"No," in a low tone.

"Do you imagine you are pleasing me by making this request?" he exclaims angrily, glancing down at me as I stand staring up at him, my head barely reaching his shoulder. Reproach and entreaty are in my uplifted eyes, but they do not soften him. "Do you think you are offering me compensation? Pray do not for a moment believe I am either hurt or annoyed by your behaviour of this evening. Why should I? You are not the only woman in the world who has suddenly developed a talent for flirtations."

"Marmaduke, what are you saying? Of what are you accusing me?"

I am nearly in tears by this time, and cannot find words to argue or deny the horrid imputation of coquetry.

"Do not let me stand in the way of your amusements. Of course when I chose to marry a child—and a child without a spark of affection for me—I must learn not to cavil at consequences. Understand, Phyllis, it is a matter of indifference to me

whether you drive home with Mark Gore or any other man. Do not give yourself any annoyance, under a mistaken impression that you may be gratifying me. Take your choice of an escort."

"I have taken it," I say, dolefully, "but the one I want won't take me. Marmaduke, how unkind you are! Do you, then, *refuse* to drive me home?"

"If you insist on sitting beside me you can do so," he yields, ungraciously. "You will find it stupid, as I am in no mood for conversation, and have no desire for your company."

"Nevertheless I will force it on you," I cry, with some faint spark of pride and indignation. "Though you hate me I will return with no one but you."

And so it is settled, and soon we are driving side by side under the brilliant dancing stars.

It is a long, long drive—much longer, it seems to me, in the chill night than in the glare of day, and not one word does my companion speak. Once, when the moon rushes out with a white gleam from behind the scudding clouds, I take courage to look at him; but he is biting his moustache, and wears upon his brow a heavy frown that completely freezes on my lips the few silly words I would have uttered.

Once, too, as his hand lies bare upon his knee I venture to place my fingers timidly upon it, but he shakes them off, under a plain pretence of ad-

justing the reins; and thus, twice repulsed, I have no heart to make a further advance.

So, in dead silence, we make our journey, listening absently to the chatter of those behind and the sound of the horses' feet as they bravely cover the ground.

In silence we reach our home, in silence he helps me down, and with the sorriest pain at my heart it has ever yet known I go upstairs and shut myself into my room.

Martha, under a mistaken impression that I am what she is pleased to term "poorly," pours out some eau de Cologne and proceeds to bathe my forehead with vigorous concern; and such is the forlornness of my state, that I cannot bring myself to bid her begone. When she has put me through the various stages of undressing, has left me ready for bed, and insisted on hearing me say I am immensely better, she departs, to my infinite relief.

I turn dismally in my chair, and begin to wonder what I am to do next. Every minute my crime appears more hideous—I feel more positive he will never forgive me.

Strangely enough, as my own misdemeanours grow in size and importance his decrease, until at length they sink into utter insignificance. The remembrance of that pink note alone rankles, and perhaps even that could be explained.

The hours slip by. 'Duke's foot is to be heard slowly pacing his own floor.

I must and will compel him to make friends with me. How can I face a long sleepless night such as I know will be mine if I go to bed unpardoned? I will make one more effort, and this time I will not be unsuccessful. As I have not now, and never have had, a particle of pride in my composition, it takes me very little thinking to decide on this course.

I am sitting before my fire as I develop this idea toasting my bare toes in a rather purposeless manner, preparatory to jumping into bed. Unlike most people, I can endure any amount of heat to the soles of my feet.

Mechanically I slip into my blue slippers and, rising, go to the glass. Yes, what I see pleases me —I certainly do look nice in my dressing-gown. No other style of garment, no matter how bewitching or elaborate, suits me half as well. This particular gown at which I am now gazing profoundly is of white cachemire, lined and wadded, and trimmed profusely with pale blue. There is a dear little frill round the neck that almost makes me love myself. It is a gift of Marmaduke's. Walking one day in Paris, during our honeymoon, it had attracted our attention in a shop-window, and he had insisted on my going into the shop then and there and making myself the owner of it. Surely when he sees

me now he will remember the circumstance, and it will soften him.

Ah! he was very fond of me then, I recollect, with a sigh.

My hair is streaming down my back far below my waist; I am looking well, but young—very young; indeed, I am painfully conscious that, now my high-heeled shoes are lying under a chair, I might easily be mistaken for a child of fourteen.

The thought is distasteful. Hastily putting up my hands, I wind my hair round and round my head until I have reduced it to its every-day decorous fashion; only to find that rolls and smoothness do not accord well with a *négligé* costume.

Looking at myself again with a critical eye, I am again dissatisfied. I may appear older, I certainly do not present so "fetching" a *tout ensemble*; so, with much vicious haste, I once more draw out the hair pins and let my straight brown hair hang according to its fancy. Being now at last convinced I am to be seen at my best, I proceed to act upon the thought that has caused all this unwonted vanity. I go softly to Marmaduke's dressing-room door, armed with my brush, and begin to batter at it pretty loudly.

"Marmaduke, Marmaduke!" I cry, but to obtain no answer. That he is within is beyond all doubt, as every now and then through the thick oaken door I can hear a sound or two.

Again I exercise my lungs, again I batter at the door.

"'Duke—Marmaduke!" I cry once more, impatiently.

"What do you want?" demands my husband, in a voice that sends my heart into my blue slippers.

"I want to get in," I return, as meekly as one can when one's tone is raised to its highest pitch.

"You cannot now; I am busy."

"But I must. 'Duke, do open the door. I have something of the utmost importance to say to you."

After a moment or two I can hear him coming slowly to the door. In another instant he has unlocked it, and is standing in the doorway, in an attitude that is plainly meant to bar my further approach.

"Won't you let me in?" I say, "I want to speak to you, I have something to tell you."

Here I make a dive under the arm he has placed against one side of the door as a prudent barricade, and gain the dressing-room. Having so far succeeded, I pause, to glance timidly at him.

He has divested himself of his coat and waistcoat, and has evidently been brushing his hair, as it is smooth to the last degree, and has about it a general air of being ready to enter a ball-room at a moment's notice.

"You might be going to a reception, your hair

is so beautifully dressed," I say, with a weak attempt at raillery and composure.

"Did you nearly break down the door, to come and tell me that?" asks he, without a vestige of a smile.

Once again my eyes seek the carpet. All my affected nonchalance deserts me. I feel frightened. Never before has his voice sounded so harsh when addressed to me. I put my hands behind me, and grasp nervously the torrent of hair that flows down my back. For the second time it occurs to me how abominably young I must be looking. Somehow the word "Doll" writes itself before my lowered eyes.

"No," I say, in a whisper. "I came to ask you to forgive me. To tell you I am very sorry for it all."

"Are you? I am glad of that. In my opinion you could not be too sorry."

"Oh, Duke, do not be *too* hard to me. I did not mean to make you so *very* angry. I did not think there was any harm, in what—I did."

"*No harm?* No harm in flirting so outrageously as to bring down upon you the censure of all your guests? No harm in making yourself the subject of light gossip? Do you know that ever since last night, when you chose to disgrace both yourself and me by your conduct, I have felt half maddened. '*Angry*,' the word does not express what

I feel. A hundred times during these past few hours I have with the utmost difficulty restrained myself."

"I don't see that I have done anything so very terrible; I have not behaved worse than—than others I could name; I don't believe anybody noticed me," I reply miserably, and most untruthfully.

"Pshaw! How blind you must think people. Do you suppose they will not comment freely on your going to that low place with Gore, at nine o'clock at night, *alone*. I own my belief in their dulness or good nature is not as comfortable a one as yours. Blanche Going, at all events, spoke to me openly about it."

I instantly take fire.

"No doubt," I cry, with passion. "Lady Blanche Going has her own reasons for wishing to degrade me in my husband's sight. She is a wicked woman! Were I to do *half* what she has done, and is capable of doing, I would be ashamed to look you in the face. I *hate* her! If you believe what *she* says, rather than what *I* say, of course there is little use in my speaking further in my own defence."

"I believe only what I see," returns my husband significantly, "and that—I regret to say it of you Phyllis—is more than I can think of with calmness."

He turns from me as he speaks, and begins to pace excitedly up and down the room, a frown born of much anger upon his forehead.

"To think you should have chosen *that* fellow, who has hardly a shred of character left, as your—*friend*."

It would be impossible to put on paper the amount of scorn he throws into the last word.

"He is no friend of mine," I say, sullenly, beating my foot petulantly against the ground. "I always understood he was a particular favourite of yours. If you consider him such a disreputable creature, why did you invite him to your house?"

"Because I was unfortunately under the impression I could ask any man with safety into my *wife's* house," says he, loftily; and the quotation in which Cæsar's wife is brought to bear comes to my mind—I am almost tempted to mention it for purposes of provocation, but refrain. In truth, I am really unhappy, and at my wit's end by this. Surely, I cannot have so altogether forgotten myself as he seems to imagine.

"There are worse people here than Mark Gore," I remark, still sullen.

"If there are I don't know them; and certainly do not wish to discuss them. The misdemeanours of the world do not concern me, it is with you alone I have to deal. Ever since Gore entered this house you have shown an open, and most undignified desire for his society. I bore it all in silence, neither thwarting you, nor exhibiting my displeasure in any way; but when I see you casting aside common

prudence, and making yourself a subject for scandalous remarks, I think it is high time for me to interfere and assert my authority. Were you several years younger than you are, you are still quite old enough to know right from wrong; and for the future—" here he stops short close beside me, and, with his blue eyes flashing, goes on, "for the future I will insist on your conducting yourself as my wife should."

When a man is without his coat and waistcoat, and thinks himself ill-used, he generally looks more than his actual height. Marmaduke, standing before me with up-lifted hand to enforce his remarks, and with a very white face, certainly appears uncomfortably tall. He is towering over poor little me in my heel-less shoes and white gown, and for a moment it occurs to me that I ought to feel frightened; the next instant anger has overpowered me, and raised me to his level.

"How *dare* you speak to me like that? By what right do *you* use such language? You who every hour of the day make yourself conspicuous with that horrible cousin of yours? Do you suppose, then, that I have no eyes—that I cannot fathom motives, and actions, and——"

"What do you mean?" interrupts he, haughtily.

"That sounds very well, but if, when you accused me of flirting with Mark Gore, *I* had drawn myself up, and asked, in an injured tone, 'what you

meant,' you would very soon have told me I knew only too well. Have I not noticed you with Blanche? Do you ever leave her side? Whispering in corridors —lingering in conservatories—letting her write you letters. Oh! I know *everything!*" cry I, absolutely sobbing with long pent-up rage and grief.

"Write me letters!" repeats Duke, in utter bewilderment.

"Yes; long, *long* letters. I saw it."

"Blanche never in her life wrote me a long letter, or any other letter, that I can recollect."

"*Oh!* When I saw it with my own eyes, and only yesterday, too! How *can* you deny it? In the morning she pretended she had a headache, and I went up to ask her how she was, and there on the table was a pink note, with three of the pages closely written over, and while I stayed she folded it into a cocked hat; and when I came home in the evening I went into your room—*this* room—for some eau de Cologne, and it was lying *there* on that table under my *nose*," I wind up, with passionate vulgarity.

"I think you must be raving," says Duke, his own vehemence quieted by mine. "I don't know what you are talking about. A letter—yet stay," a look of intelligence coming into his face; and going over to a drawer, he rummages there for a moment, and at length produces the very three-corned note

that has caused me so many jealous pangs. "Is this the note you mean?"

"Yes, it is," coming eagerly forward.

"I now recollect finding this in my room, when I returned from shooting yesterday. She asks me to do a commission for her, which, as it happens, quite slipped my memory until now. Take and read it, and see how just were your suspicions."

As I put out my hand, I know that I am acting meanly, but still I do take it, and opening it, find my three closely-written pages have dwindled down to half a one. Five or six lines, carelessly scrawled, are before me.

"Are you satisfied?" asks Duke, who, half-sitting on the table with folded arms, is watching me attentively.

"Yes," in a low voice, "I was wrong. This is not the note I saw with her. I now understand she must have meant *that* one for—for somebody else, and knowing I saw it, sent this to you to blind me."

"*More* suspicions, Phyllis! As to what other charges you have brought against me, I can only swear that when I told you a year ago you were the only woman I had ever really loved I spoke the truth."

"From all you have said to me to-night, I can scarcely imagine you would now repeat those words," I say, in trembling tones.

"Yes, I would. If I live to be an old man, I

shall never love again as I have loved, and *do* love, you."

"Yet you are always meeting Blanche,—you are always with her. Only this very morning I found you both together in the corridor in earnest conversation."

"It was quite by accident we met; I had no idea she was there."

"She was speaking to you of me?"

"She said something about your manner towards Gore the night previous. It was something very kind I remember, but it angered me to think anyone had noticed you, though in my heart I knew it must be so. It was too palpable. She meant nothing hurtful."

"The wretch! Duke, listen to me, and believe me. If I had not felt positive that note," moving a little nearer and laying my finger upon it, "was the one I saw with her, I would never have acted towards Mark Gore as I did last night. But I felt wounded and cut to the heart, and tried to torture you as I was being tortured. It was foolish, wicked of me, I know, but it made no one so miserable as myself."

"But then—the rink." He speaks very quietly now, but he has come off the table, and is standing before me, one hand resting on it, very close to mine, but not touching. I have crept still nearer,

and am gazing earnestly into his face with large wistful eyes.

"It was the same longing for revenge made me go there—nothing else. I had tried to make up with you by asking you to take me to the rink in the evening, but you would not meet my advances, and answered me very cruelly." My lips tremble. "Your words restored all my anger. I was determined to show you I could go there without your permission. Sir Mark was on the spot, and asked me to go with him; it was all the same to me who I went with, so long as I could defy you, and I agreed to accompany him; not, as you thought, because I wished to be with him, but only to vex you. I thought of no one but you. It would not trouble me if I never saw Mark Gore again. You believe me, Duke? I never told you a wilful lie, did I?" two heavy tears long gathering roll down my cheeks.

"Never," replies he, hoarsely.

Silence follows his last word. We stand very near, yet separate, gazing into each other's eyes. Presently, impulsively, his hand moves, and closes firmly upon mine. For an instant longer we gaze, and then I am in his arms, crying as if my heart would break.

"You don't care for her; *say* you don't care for her," I sob entreatingly.

"Phyllis, how can you ask me. To care for

that worldly-wise woman, when I have *you* to love, my own darling—my angel!"

This is comforting; it almost sounds as though he were calling her bad names, and I sob on contentedly from the shelter of his arms.

"And you will never speak to her again, will you, *dear* Duke?"

"Oh, my pet! You forget she is a guest in the house. How can I avoid speaking and being civil to her?"

"Of course I don't mean *that*. But you will have no *tête-à-têtes*, and you won't be so attentive to her, and you will be very glad when she goes away?"

"I will indeed, most sincerely delighted, if her staying causes you one moment's unhappiness. She speaks of leaving next week; let us be polite to her for these few remaining days—poor Blanche! and then we will forget she ever lived."

"Yes," I acquiesce, and then there is a pause in the conversation. Is he not going to touch on the other cause of war. For a little time I am filled with wonderment; then I say, shyly, "You do not ask me about Mark Gore."

"No," replies he, hastily, "nor will I. I understand everything—I believe all you said. A misconception arose between us, now it is at rest for ever, let us refer to it no more. Now that it is at an end I feel rather flattered at your being so

jealous; it tells me you must be getting to care for me a little."

"Oh, *caring* is a poor thing. I think now I love you better than anyone in the world except———."

"Billy, and Roly, and Mamma," he mimics me, laughing, though he bites his lips; "the old story."

"Wrong; I was going to say mother only. Somehow, Billy and Roly of late do not seem so dear as you." I stroke his face patronisingly.

"Only mother!" he says with a gay laugh (how many weeks have passed since last I heard that laugh); "why, that is much better. Billy always appeared the most formidable rival. I am progressing in your good books. In time I may even be able to vanquish mother."

"I am so glad I made that onslaught on your door a little while ago," declare I merrily, "and I think you were very undecided about letting me in. How good it is to be *quite* friends again; and we have not been that for a long time. Oh, is not jealousy a horrible pain?"

"'And to be wroth with those we love
Doth work like madness on the brain,'"

quotes Duke softly.

"It all began by Mark Gore telling me you were once engaged to Blanche Going."

"What a lie!" cries Duke, so eagerly, that I cannot choose but believe him. "How often am I to tell you I never loved anyone but you?"

"That is another thing. Men always imagine when they form a new attachment, that the old ones contained no real love. What I should like to know is, how many you asked to marry you?" My words are uttered jestingly, yet his face changes, very slightly, ever so little, yet it certainly changes. Only a little pallor, a little faint contraction, nothing more. It is gone almost as soon as it is there.

"I never asked Blanche, at all events," he laughs lightly. And not until many days have come and gone do I remember his singular hesitation.

CHAPTER V.

Two days have passed; two days that have brought back to me all the light and life and gladness of my girlhood. Never since my marriage have I been so happy as now.

Marmaduke and I are the best of friends, there is not so much as the shadow of a cloud between us, and I have convinced myself that, as I was the most foolish girl in the world, so am I now the luckiest, and that Duke is the dearest old boy to be found anywhere. If I still feel guilty of having no passionate attachment for my husband, I console myself with the thought that I am probably incapable of a grand passion, and that haply I shall

get through life all the more comfortably in consequence.

Harriet and Bébé notice the new relations existing between me and my husband with undisguised pleasure, but wisely make no comment. Sir James sees it too, and once, in passing me, smiles and pats me approvingly on the shoulder. Dora and George Ashurst are too much taken up with each other, and their approaching nuptials, to notice anything but their own tastes and predilections. But Blanche Going sees it with an evil sneer.

* * * * * *

It is three o'clock in the afternoon. Outside, the world is looking cold and uninviting; inside, all is warmth and apparent contentment.

Some of us are in the billiard room knocking about the balls, but doing more talk than honest work. I for my part am starting for a brisk run to the gardens, with a view to bringing Cummins to order.

Cummins is an ancient Scotchman, old, crusty, and valuable, who has lived as head gardener at Strangemore for more years than he can remember, and who has grown sour in the Carrington service. Having made himself more than usually obnoxious to-day, and declined to part with some treasured article of his rearing for anyone's benefit, the cook has tearfully appealed to me, and I have promised to exert myself, and coax my own gardener into

giving me some of my own property. Throwing round me, therefore, a cosy shawl, fur-lined, and covering my head with the warmest velvet hat I own, I sally forth, bent on conquest.

The air is keen and frost-bitten. As I hurry along one of the smaller paths, hedged in on either side by giant evergreens, with my chin well buried in my fur, I come suddenly upon Sir Mark Gore, leisurely strolling, and smoking a cigar.

Ever since my explanation with Marmaduke, I have carefully avoided Sir Mark. Not once has he had an opportunity of speaking with me alone. Not once have I suffered him to draw me into personal conversation. Consequently, I am doubly put out and annoyed by this rencontre—conscience telling me he cares more for me than is at all to be desired.

Seeing me he flings the cigar over the hedge, and comes more quickly forward.

"Oh don't do that," I say, as unconcernedly as I well can; "you have recklessly wasted a good cigar. I am in a desperate hurry, and cannot stay to interfere with your smoking."

"It is the simplest thing in the world to light another," replies he, coolly. "But what a day for you to be out. I heard you say at lunch you meant going, but felt positive this bitter wind would daunt you. May I accompany you in your desperate hurry? Is it an errand of mercy—a case of life or death?"

His easy manner reassures me.

"I am going to entreat Cummins," I say, laughing. "Don't you pity me? Cannot you understand what a difficult task I have laid out for myself? No; I think you had better not come. I shall be able to use more persuasive arts if left to deal with him alone."

"I would back you to win, were he the king of the Cannibal Islands himself. If I must not witness your triumph, may I at least be your escort on the road to it?"

I can see he is obstinately bent on being my companion, and grow once more disquieted.

"Ye-es, if you wish it," I say with obvious unwillingness; "but it is such a little way now it scarcely seems worth your while."

"I think it very well worth my while, and accept your *gracious* permission," replies Sir Mark, with a quiet stress on the adjective, and a determination not to notice my evident objection to his company. So there is no help for it, and we walk on side by side in silence.

Presently, in a low voice, he says suddenly and without preface,

"Why do you avoid me, Mrs. Carrington? What have I done to be tabooed as I have been for the last two days? Have I offended you in any way?"

"Offended me?" I stammer (when people are unexpectedly asked an obnoxious question, what

would they do if they could not repeat their questioner's last words). "Of course you have not offended me. How could you? What can have put such a ridiculous idea into your head?"

"Your own conduct. Do you think I have not seen, and felt, your changed manner?" He is speaking almost in an undertone. "Were I your greatest enemy, you could not treat me with more distant coolness. You scarcely deign to speak to me—your eyes carefully avoid mine—you hardly answer when I address you. Surely you must have a motive for all this."

"In the first place I do not acknowledge your 'this.' You only imagine my manner changed. I certainly have no motive for being rude to you."

"Then I think you have treated me very cruelly. Very capriciously, considering all things."

The last words are barely distinct, he is evidently using great self-control, but in my present nervous state, all sounds are very clear to me.

"What things, Sir Mark?" I demand, with an irrepressible touch of hauteur. He is looking steadily at me,—so steadily, that in spite of myself, to my mortification and disgust, I feel I am blushing furiously. Still I hold my ground, I absolutely decline to let my eyes fall before his.

"I suppose," says Sir Mark very quietly still, "when a woman has led a man on to love her, until he is mad enough to lose his head, and

imagine he has awakened in her mind some faint interest in himself, she is not to be held responsible for any mischief that may come of it. I say I suppose not. But it is, perhaps, a little hard on the man."

"I do not understand you," I say, with as much calmness as I can summon, though, in truth, I am horribly frightened, and can feel my heart beating heavily against my side.

"Do you not," exclaims he, with a rapid vehement change of tone, "then I shall explain. I am not so blind but I can see now all that has been happening here during the past month. Were you jealous of Marmaduke? Did you imagine he could love another, when you were ever before him? Did you seek to revenge yourself upon him, by turning your sweet looks, and sweeter words upon me, by showering upon me all the childish maddening graces of which you are capable, until you stole the very heart out of my body?"

"Oh don't," I cry, tremulously, recoiling from him, a look of horrified amazement on my face. "You do not know what you are saying. It is terrible. I will not listen to you."

"Yes, you will," fiercely. "Does it hurt you to hear it? Does it distress you to know that I love you—I, who never before loved anyone—that I love you with a passion that no words could describe. You have ruined my life; and now that you have

attained your object, have satisfied yourself of Marmaduke's affection—you throw me, your victim, aside, as something old, worn-out, worthless, careless of the agony you have inflicted. It is cold, cruel, innocent children like you, who do all the real mischief in this life. Do you remember those words of Moore's? they haunt me every time I see you—

'Too bright and fair,
To let wild passion write
One wrong wish there.'

I believe you are incapable of loving, though so lovable in yourself."

"You have said enough—is it manly of you to compel me to hear such words? Surely you must have exhausted all your bitterness by this."

"'Reproach is infinite, and knows no end.' Yet of what use to reproach you. You have a heart that cannot be touched. Possibly you do not even feel regret for what you have done."

"Sir Mark, I entreat—I desire you to cease."

"You shall be obeyed; for I have finished. There is nothing more to be said. I was determined you should at least hear, and know what you have done. Now you can go home happy in the thought that you have added one more fool to your list. Yes, I will cease. Have you anything to say?"

"Only this; I desire you will leave my house without delay."

My lips are white and trembling, but it is anger, not nervousness, that affects me now.

"This moment if you wish it," with a short laugh.

"No; I will have no comments made. You can easily make a reasonable excuse out of your letters to-morrow morning. After all you have said, I hope I shall never see your face again."

"You never shall, if it depends on me."

"I regret that I ever——"

"Oh pray leave all the rest unsaid, Mrs. Carrington," he interrupts, bitterly, "I can fancy it. You regret of course you ever admitted such a fallen character within your doors; I have insulted and wounded you in every possible way. So be it. You say so, therefore it must be true. At the same time I would have you remember, what is also true, that I would die to save you from any grief or harm. If," sinking his voice, and speaking in a slow peculiar tone, "if you are ever in deep trouble, and I can help you, think of me."

I am impressed without knowing why. It is as though someone had laid a curse upon me. I grow as white as death, and my breath comes from me in short, quick gasps. At this moment, a deadly fear of something intangible, far-off, of something lying in the mystic future, passes over me like a cold wind.

Sir Mark raising his hat draws near. He takes my chilled gloveless hand.

"May I?" he asks, humbly, and with the natural grace that belongs to him, "it is a farewell."

Oppressed with my nameless terror I cannot reply; I scarcely hear him; stooping, he lays his lips lightly on my hand.

The touch recalls me. With a shudder I snatch away my fingers, and, drawing back, sweep past him in eager haste to rid myself of him, and the evil fears to which his words have given rise.

I hurry on with parted lips, and trembling pulses anxious to escape. Crossing a rustic bridge that spans a small stream at the end of the pathway, I glance instinctively backwards. He is still standing motionless on the exact spot where we parted, his arms folded, his head bare, his eyes fixed upon my retreating form. Again I shudder, and hasten out of sight.

* * * * * * * *

I have said "I will never see his face again."

To carry out this design I determine on suffering from headache for once in my life, and by this means absent myself from dinner. Armed with this resolution, I go swiftly to my room as the early night closes in, having lingered in the gardens as long as prudence would permit.

Throwing myself upon a sofa, I summon the faithful Martha, and declare myself unwell. They hardly constitute a lie these words of mine, as my temples, through excitement and uneasiness, are throbbing

painfully. I feel feverish, and miserably restless, though my foolish superstition of a few hours since has resolved itself into thin air and vanished. Still how can I draw breath freely while "*that man*" continues to haunt the house?

"Dear, dear me, M'm," says Martha, coming to the front as usual, with mournful vehemence, and an unlimited supply of remedies. "You do look bad to be sure. You really should get advice, M'm. There is young Doctor Manley in the village, as is that clever, I do hear, as he can cure anything; and you are getting them headaches dreadful frequent. Only two days since I used a whole bottle of ody collun upon your pore forehead. But vinegar is an elegant thing, and much stronger than the ody. Shall I try it, M'm?"

"No, thank you, Martha," I say, feeling hysterical; "I prefer the 'Ody;'" whereupon Johann Maria Farina is produced, and I am gently bathed for five minutes.

Marmaduke comes softly in.

"A headache, darling," he says, with tender commiseration; "that is too bad. Martha, give me the bottle. I will see to your mistress."

"The delicatest touch possible, if you please, sir," says Martha, warningly, who doesn't believe in men, as she leaves the room. She is dreadfully old maidish, this favourite attendant of mine, but she adores me, and with me to be loved is a necessity.

I have made up my mind to say nothing to Duke on the subject of Sir Mark, until the latter is well out of the house. So for the present I permit my husband to think my slight indisposition about the worst of its kind ever known.

"What can have given it to you?" he says, damping my hot brow with more than a woman's gentleness. "I told you, Phyllis, it was very foolish of you to venture out of doors to-day; I hope you have not got a chill."

"I don't think so. I put on very warm things. But, Marmaduke, I would not like to go down to dinner. Do you think my staying away would appear odd?"

"Certainly not, pet. I will explain to everyone. Bed is the best place for you; promise me you will go to sleep as soon as you can."

"As soon as ever I can. Oh, Duke, there is a quarter-past chiming, and you not dressed yet. Hurry; it will be dreadful if neither of us can show at the proper moment."

"I won't be an instant," says Duke, and scrambles through the performance with marvellous rapidity, getting down to the drawing-room before the second gong sounds.

I have accomplished my purpose, and will probably, nay certainly, not be called upon to see the dreaded features of Sir Mark again. Early to-morrow morning I trust he will be beyond recall.

It never occurs to me to think what hours the trains leave Carston, which is our nearest railway station. To-morrow, too, I shall explain everything to Duke; to conceal the real facts of the case from him, even for so short a time, grieves me sorely.

I begin presently to fancy what they may be saying and doing down in the dining-room; and, so fancying, it suddenly comes to me that I am healthily and decidedly hungry. When going in for a violent headache, I certainly had not counted upon this, and laugh to myself at the trap of my own making, into which I have fallen. Ill or not ill, however, dinner I must and will have.

I ring the bell and summon Martha.

"Well, M'm, are you anything better?" asks that damsel, stealing in on tip-toe, and speaking in a stage whisper.

"I am," I respond, briskly, sitting up; "and oh, Martha, it is odd, is it not, but I do feel so awfully hungry."

"No, do you reelly, M'm?" exclaims Martha, delighted; "that's a rare good sign. I don't hold with no appetite, myself. Lie down again, M'm, quiet-like, and I'll bring you up a tray as 'll tempt you, in two minutes. A little bit of fowl now, and a slice of 'am, will be the lightest for you; and will you take Moselle, M'm, or champagne?"

"Moselle," I reply, feeling something of the pleasurable excitement of long ago, when Billy used to smuggle eatables into my chamber of punishment; "and, Martha, if there is any orange pudding, or iced pudding, you know, you might——"

"I'll bring it, M'm," says Martha. And presently I am doing full justice to as dainty a little dinner as Martha's love could procure.

I sleep well; but permit myself to be persuaded into staying in my room for breakfast. After that meal downstairs, Marmaduke comes tramping up to see how I am. It is eleven o'clock; surely Sir Mark can have made his excuses, and taken his departure by this time.

"Is he gone?" I ask in a hollow whisper, as Duke enters my room.

"Who?"

"Mark Gore."

"No, not yet. Did you *know* he was going?" Looking much surprised and seating himself on the edge of the bed.

"I did. I *desired* him to go. Shut the door close; and I will tell you all about it. But first, Duke, before I say one word, make me a vow, you will not be angry with him, or take any notice of what he has done."

"What has he done?" demands Duke, growing a trifle paler.

"No harm to anyone. Make me your vow first."

"I vow then," says he, impatiently. And I forthwith repeat to him word for word all that passed between Sir Mark and me, in the evergreen walk.

"The scoundrel!" says Duke, when I have finished.

"Yes, just so," say I. "I really think he must have gone mad. However, there was no excuse for it, so I simply ordered him out of the house. He looked dreadfully unhappy. After all, perhaps he could not help it."

Duke laughs in spite of his anger, which is extreme.

"Of all the conceited little women," he says; "what gave you the headache last night? Was it his conduct?"

"Well, I think it was founded on a determination not to see him again. But I was afraid to tell you anything then, lest you might refuse to sit at table with him, or be uncivil, or have a row in any way. You will remember your promise, Duke, and let him go quietly away. An explanation would do no good. Once he is gone, it will not signify."

"He used to be such a good fellow," says Duke, in a puzzled, provoked tone.

"Well, he is anything but that now," reply I with decision. "If you go away now, Duke, I think I will get up. I daresay he will be on his way to London by the time I am dressed."

I get through my toilette with a good deal of deliberation. I am in no great hurry to find myself downstairs; I am determined to afford him every chance of getting clear of the premises before I make my appearance.

When dressed to Martha's satisfaction, I go cautiously through the house, and, contrary to my usual custom, make straight for Marmaduke's study. Opening the door without knocking, I find myself face to face with Marmaduke and Sir Mark Gore.

I feel petrified, and somewhat guilty. Of what use my condemning myself to solitary confinement for so many hours, if the close of them only brings me in contact with what I have so striven to avoid?

Marmaduke's blue eyes are flashing, and his lips are white and compressed. Sir Mark, always dark and supercilious, is looking much the same as usual, except for a certain bitter expression that adorns the corners of his mouth. Both men regard me fixedly as I enter, but with what different feelings.

Marmaduke holds out his hand to me, and the flash dies in his eyes. Sir Mark's lips form the one word "false."

"No, I am not false," I protest, vehemently, putting my hand through Marmaduke's arm, and glancing at my opponent defiantly from my shelter; "Duke is my husband, why should I hide anything from him. I told you I would conceal nothing."

"What charming wifely conduct," says Sir Mark with a sneer; "not only do you confide in him all your own little affairs, but you are ready also at a moment's notice, to forgive him any peccadilloes of which he has been guilty."

I feel Duke quiver with rage, but laying a warning pressure on his arm, I succeed in restraining him.

"He has been guilty of none," I cry, indignantly. "He never cared for anyone but me as you well know."

Sir Mark looks down, and smiles meaningly—I redden with anger.

"Why are you not gone?" I ask inhospitably, "you promised you would leave early this morning."

"Grant me a little grace, Mrs. Carrington. Had I had time I might, indeed, have ordered a special train, but as matters stand, I am compelled to be your guest, until one be allowed by the authorities to start. But for your entrance here just now, which I did not anticipate, I would not have troubled you by my presence again. However, it is the last time you shall be so annoyed. Perhaps you will bid me good-bye, and grant me your forgiveness before I go. You at least should find it easy to pardon, as it was my unfortunate and undue admiration for yourself caused me to err."

His tone is light and mocking, there is even a half smile upon his lips. He treats Marmaduke's

presence as though he were utterly unaware of it. Yet still something beneath his sneering manner makes me know he does repent, either his false step, or its consequences.

It is with amazement I discover I bear him no ill-will. Indeed, I might almost be said to feel sorrow for him at this present moment. I shall be intensely relieved and glad when he is no longer before me; but he has been kind and pleasant to me, in many ways, during these past two months, and I forgive him. I put my hand in his, and say "good-bye," gently. He holds it tightly for an instant, then drops it.

"Good-bye, Carrington," he says, coolly; "I hope when next we meet time will have softened your resentment."

He moves towards the door with his usual careless graceful step.

"And I hope," says Duke in a voice clear and quiet, yet full of suppressed passion, "that the day we meet again is far distant. I have no desire to renew acquaintance in the future with a man who has so basely abused the rights of friendship and hospitality. You have chosen to act the part of a scoundrel. Keep to it, therefore, and avoid the society of honest men. For myself I shall endeavour to forget I ever knew anyone so contemptible."

"Take care," says Sir Mark, in a low fierce tone. "Don't try me too far. '*Honest* men!' Re-

member one thing, Carrington—you owe me something for my forbearance."

For a full minute the two men glare at each other, then the door is flung open, and Mark is gone.

"What did he mean by that?" ask I, frightened and tearful. "What was that he said about forbearance? Tell me, Duke."

Marmaduke's face is white as death.

"Nothing," he answers with an effort. "It is only a stagey way he has of speaking. Let us forget him."

* * * * *

So Mark Gore drops out of our life for the present. Three days later Lady Blanche Going also takes her departure.

As we assemble in the Hall to bid her good-bye—I, from an oppressive sense of what is demanded by the laws of courtesy, the others through the dawdling idleness that belongs to a country-house—she sweeps up to me, and, with an unusually bewitching smile, says, sweetly—

"Good-bye, dear Mrs. Carrington. Thank you so much for all your kindness to me—I really don't remember when I have enjoyed myself so well, as here at dear old Strangemore with you."

Here she stoops forward, as though she would press her lips to my cheek. Instantaneously dropping both her hand and my handkerchief, I bend

to pick up the latter; when I raise myself again, she has wisely passed on, and so I escape the hypocritical salute.

Marmaduke puts her, maid, traps, and all, into the carriage. The door is shut, the horses start; I am well rid of another troublesome guest. I draw a deep sigh of relief as two ideas present themselves before my mind. One is, that I am better out of it all than I deserve; the second, that never again, under any circumstances, shall she enter my doors.

* * * * *

It is the night before Harriet's departure, and almost all our guests have vanished. Our two military friends have resumed their regimental duties a week ago; Sir George Ashurst has gone to London for a little while; Dora has decided on burying herself at Summerleas during his absence—I suppose, to meditate soberly upon the coming event.

It is nine o'clock. Dinner is a thing of the past. Even the gentlemen having tired of each other, or the wine, or the politics, have strolled into the drawing-room, and are now indulging in such light converse, as they deem suitable to our feeble understandings.

Suddenly the door is flung wide, and Bébé comes hurriedly in—so hurriedly that we all refrain from speech, and raise our eyes to rivet them upon

her. She is nervous—half laughing—yet evidently scared.

"Oh Marmaduke," she says, with a little gasp, and going up to him and fastening her fingers on his arm, "I have seen a ghost."

"A *what?*" says Duke.

"A ghost—a downright veritable ghost. Now don't look so incredulous—I am thoroughly in earnest. I was never in my life before so frightened. I tell you I saw it plainly, and quite close. Oh! how I ran."

She puts her other hand to her heart, and draws a long breath.

Naturally we all stare at her, and feel interested directly. A *real* spectre is not a thing of every-day occurrence. I feel something stronger than interest; I am terrified beyond measure, and rising from my seat, I look anxiously at Duke.

"I never heard there was a ghost here before," I say reproachfully. "Is the house haunted? Oh Duke, you never told me of it,—and I have gone about it all hours, and sometimes even *without a light.*"

I conclude there is something comical in my dismay, as Marmaduke and Lord Chandos burst out laughing; Thornton fairly roars, while Sir James gets as near an outburst of merriment as he ever did in his life.

"Is there a ghost in your family?" I demand

rather sharply, feeling nettled at their heartless mirth.

"No, I am afraid we have nothing belonging to us half so respectable. All the ancestors I ever heard of died most amiably, either on the battle-field, or on the gallows, or in their beds. We cannot lay claim to a single murder, or suicide; there is not even a solitary instance of a duel being fought within these walls. I doubt we are a tame race. There is not a spark of romance about us. Bébé's imagination has run riot."

"I tell you I saw it," persists Bébé, indignantly. "Am I to disbelieve my own sight? I was walking along the corridor off the picture gallery quite quietly, thinking of anything in the world but supernatural subjects, when all at once, as I got near the window, I saw a face looking in at me from the balcony outside."

"Oh Bébé!" I cry faintly, casting a nervous glance behind me, as I edge closer to Lord Chandos, who happens to be the one nearest me.

"It was a horrible face, wicked, but handsome. The head was covered with something dark, and it was only the eyes I noticed; they were *unearthly*—so large, and black, and revengeful; they had *murder* in them," Bébé stops, shuddering.

"Really, Carrington, it is too bad of you," says Chips reprovingly, "if you keep them at all, they should at least be amiable. I wonder Miss Beatoun

lives to tell the tale. Pray go on, it is positively enthralling. Did the eyes spit fire?"

"The head vanished while I stared, and then I dropped my candle and ran downstairs, as though I were hunted. Oh! I shall never forget it."

"Probably some poor tramp prowling about," says Duke, seeing I am nearly in tears.

"It was nothing living," declares Miss Beatoun with a settled conviction, that sends a cold chill through my veins.

"Bébé, how can you be so stupid?" exclaims Duke, almost provoked, "ghosts indeed—I thought you had more sense. Come, let us go in a body, and exorcise this thing, whatever it is. I believe an apparition should be spoken of respectfully in capitals as *IT*. She may still be on the balcony."

"I think it improbable," says Chips; "she would see by the aid of Miss Beatoun's candle that it is an unlikely spot for silver spoons."

"Well, if we fail, I shall give orders for a couple of men to search the shrubberies. And whatever they find, they shall bring straight to Bébé."

"They will find nothing," says Bébé with an obstinacy quite foreign to her.

I take Marmaduke's arm, and cling to him. He looks down at me amused.

"Why you are trembling, you little goose. Perhaps you had better stay here."

"What! all alone!" I cry, aghast, "never! I would

be dead by the time you came back. No, I would rather see it out."

So we all march solemnly upstairs, armed with lights, to investigate this awful mystery.

Sir James and Thornton take the lead, as I decline to separate from Marmaduke, or to go anywhere but in the middle. Not for worlds would I head the procession, and be the first to come up with what may be in store for us. With an equal horror I shrink from being last,—fearful of being grabbed by something uncanny in the background.

The whole scene is evidently an intense amusement to the men, and even Harriet, to my disgust, finds some element of the burlesque about it. The lamps upon the staircase and along the corridors, throw shadows everywhere, and are not reassuring. Once, Mr. Thornton, stalking on in front, gives way to a dismal howl, and stopping short, throws himself into an attitude of abject fear, that causes me to nearly weep, so I entreat him, in touching accents, not to do it again, without reason.

Another time, either Harriet or Bébé—who are walking close behind me (having ordered Lord Chandos to the extreme rear, as a further precaution)—lays her hand lightly on my shoulder, whereupon I shriek aloud, and precipitate myself into Marmaduke's arms.

At length we reach the dreaded spot, and Thornton, after a few whispered words with Sir James,

flings up the window, and with what appears to me reckless courage, steps out upon the darksome balcony alone.

He is a long time absent. To me it seems ages. We three women stand waiting in breathless suspense. Bébé titters nervously.

"He is without doubt making a thorough examination," says Sir James, gravely.

We strain our eyes into the night, and even as we do so, something supernaturally tall—black—gaunt—with a white plume waving from its haughty head, advances slowly towards us, from out the gloom. I feel paralysed with fright, although instinct tells me, it is not *the thing*.

"Who are ye, that come to disturb my nightly revels?" says the plumed figure, and then we all know we are gazing at Mr. Thornton, lengthened by a sweeping brush covered with a black garment, which he holds high above his head.

"Thornton, I protest you are incorrigible," exclaims Marmaduke, when at length he can command his voice; "and I thought better of you, James, than to aid and abet him."

I am on the very verge of hysterics, a pinch, administered by Bébé, alone restrains me; as it is, the tears of alarm are mingling with the laughter I cannot suppress.

"My new black Cashmere wrap, I protest," cries Harriet, pouncing upon Chips and his sweeping

brush. "Well, really Chippendale——, and the feather out of my best bonnet. Oh! this comes of having one's room off a balcony. Why, you wicked boy, you have been upsetting all my goods and chattels. Who gave you permission, sir, to enter my bedroom?"

"Sir James," replies Chips demurely, who has emerged from his disguise, and is vainly trying to reduce his dishevelled locks to order. "It was so convenient."

"Oh, James!" says his wife, with lively reproach, "have I lived to see you perpetrate a joke?"

"But where is the spectre?" I venture to remark.

"You must really ask Miss Beatoun," says Chips. "I have done my duty valiantly; no one can say I funked it. I have done my very best to produce a respectable *bonâ fide* bogy; and if I have failed, I am not to be blamed. Now I insist on Miss Beatoun's producing hers. We cannot possibly go back to the domestics (who, I feel positive, are cowering upon the lowest stair) empty-handed. Miss Beatoun, you have brought us all here at the peril of our lives. Now where is he?"

"It was not a man," says Bébé.

"Then where is she?"

"I am not sure it was a woman either," with some hesitation.

"Ye powers," cries Chips. "Then what was it

—a mermaid? an undiscovered gender? The plot thickens. I shan't be able to sleep a wink to-night unless you be more explicit."

"Then you may stay wide awake," retorts Miss Beatoun, "as I remember nothing but those horrid eyes. You have chosen to turn it all into ridicule; and whoever heard of a ghost appearing amidst shouts of laughter? How dreadfully cold it is! do shut that window, and let us go back to the drawing-room fire."

"I hope your next venture will be more successful," says Chips, meekly. And then we all troop down again to the cosy room we have quitted, by no means wiser than when we started.

Somehow I think no more about it, and, except that I keep Martha busied in my room until I hear Marmaduke's step next door, I show no further cowardice. The general air of disbelief around me quenches my fears, and the bidding farewell to the guests I have got to like so well, occupies me to the exclusion of all other matters.

Then follows Dora's wedding, a very quiet, but very charming little affair, remarkable for nothing beyond the fact, that during the inevitable breakfast speeches, my father actually contrives to squeeze out two small tears.

The happy pair start for the Continent — the bride all smiles and brown velvet and lace, the bridegroom, perhaps, a trifle pale—and we at home

fall once more into our usual ways, and try to forget that Dora Vernon was ever anything but Lady Ashurst.

Marmaduke and I having decided on accepting no invitations until after Christmas, being filled with a desire to spend this season (which will be our first together) in our own home, settle down for a short time into a lazy Darby-and-Joan existence.

* * * * *

It is the 2nd of December, the little ormolu toy upon the mantel-piece has chimed out a quarter to five; it is almost quite dark, yet there is still a glimmer of daylight that might, perhaps, be even more pronounced but for the blazing fire within that puts it to shame.

"What a cosy little woman it is," says Duke from the doorway. "You make one hate the outer world."

"Oh, you have come," I cry, well pleased, "and in time for tea. That is right. Have you taken off your shooting things. I cannot see anything distinctly where you now are."

"I am quite clean, if you mean that," says he, laughing and advancing. "I shall do no injury to your sanctum. But it is too early to go through the regular business of dressing yet."

"Had you a good day?"

"Very good indeed, and a pleasant one altogether. Jenkins was with me, and would have come

in to pay you his respects, but thought he was hardly fit for so dainty a lady's inspection. Have you been lonely, darling? How have you occupied yourself all day?"

"Very happily," I say, surrendering one of my warm hands into his cold ones. And then I proceed to recount all the weighty affairs of business with which I have been employed during his absence.

But even as I speak the words freeze upon my lips. Between me and the dreary landscape outside rises something that chills every thought of my heart.

It is a head, closely covered with some dark clothing—the faintest outlines of a face—a pair of eyes that gleam like living coals. As I gaze horror-stricken, it disappears, so suddenly, so utterly, as to almost make me think it was a mere trick of the imagination. Almost, but not quite, the eyes still burn and gleam before me, and to my memory comes Bébé's marvellous tale.

"Duke, Duke," I cry, rising, "what is it? What have I seen? Oh! I am horribly frightened." I cling to him, and point eagerly towards the window.

"Frightened at what?" asks Duke, startled by my manner, and gazing ignorantly in the direction I have indicated.

"A face," I say, nervously. "It was there only a moment ago. I saw it quite distinctly, and eyes

so piercing. Marmaduke," shrinking closer to him, "do you remember Bébé's story?"

"My darling girl, how can you be so absurd," exclaims Duke, kindly, "letting that stupid tale upset you so. You only imagined a face, my dearest. You have been too much alone all day. There can be nothing."

"There was," I declare, positively. "I could not be so deceived."

"Nonsense, Phyllis. Come with me to the window and look out. If there really was anyone, she must be in view still."

He leads me to the window rather against my will, and makes me look out. I do so to please him, standing safely ensconced behind his arm.

"The lawn is bare," says he, convincingly; "there is no cover until one reaches the shrubberies beyond; and no one *could* have reached them since, I think. Now come with me to the other window."

I follow him submissively with the same result; and finally we finish our researches in the bow window, at the farthest end of the room.

The prospect without is dreary in the extreme. A storm is steadily rising, and the wind is soughing mournfully through the trees. Great sullen drops of rain fall with vindictive force against the panes.

"Now confess you are the most foolish child in the world," says Duke, cheerfully, seeing I am still depressed. "Who would willingly be out such an

evening as this! Not even a dog if he could help it; and certainly a spectre would have far too much sense."

"If it was fancy, it was very vivid," I say, reluctantly, "and, besides, I am not fanciful at all. It was a little unlucky, I think; it reminded me of—of——"

"A Banshee?" asks Duke, laughing.

"Well, yes, something like that," I admit, seriously. "Oh, Marmaduke, I hope no bad fortune is in store for us. I feel a strange foreboding at my heart."

"You feel a good deal of folly," says my husband. "Phyllis, I am ashamed of you. The idea of being superstitious in the nineteenth century! I shall give you a good scolding for this, and at the same time some brandy and water. Your nerves are unstrung, my dearest; that is all. Come, sit down here, and try to be sensible, while I ring the bell."

As he speaks he rings it.

"Tynon, have the grounds searched again directly. It is very annoying that tramps should be allowed the run of the place. A stop must be put to it. Half a glass of brandy and a bottle of soda."

"Yes, sir."

"Don't give me brandy and soda-water," I say, with some energy. "I do so hate it."

"How do you know?"

"Because I tasted yours the other evening, and thought it a horrible concoction. I was tired of hearing men praise it as a drink, so thought I would try if it was really as good as they said. But it was not; it was extremely disagreeable."

"It was the soda you disliked. I will put very little in, and then you will like it better."

"But, indeed, Marmaduke, I would rather not have anything."

"But, indeed, Phyllis, I must insist on your taking it. If we are going to be so ultra-fashionable as to encourage a real ghost on the premises, we must only increase our allowance of spirits, and fortify ourselves to meet it. By the by, have you decided on the sex? Bébé was rather hazy on that point."

"I don't know," I say, shuddering; "I wish you would not jest about it."

Then I drink what he has prepared for me, and in spite of my dislike to it, feel presently somewhat happier in my mind.

* * * * *

The world is only three days older, when, as I sit alone in my own room reading, Tynon opens the door, and addresses me in the semi-mysterious manner he affects.

"There's a woman downstairs, ma'am, as particularly wants to speak with you."

"A woman," I reply, lazily; "what sort of a woman, Tynon?"

"Well, ma'am, a handsome woman as far as I can judge. A furriner, I would say. A woman of a fine presence—as might be a lady, but I ain't quite certain on that point."

"Oh! Tynon, show her up," I say, hastily, feeling dismayed, as I picture to myself a lady left standing in the hall, while Tynon makes up his mind as to what her proper position in society may be.

He obeys my behest with alacrity, and in a very few moments "the woman" and I are face to face, nay, as she comes slowly forward, and throws back her veil, and fixes upon me her wonderful eyes, I know, with a sinking of the heart, that I am face to face with Bébé's ghost.

I am startled and impressed—uncomfortably impressed—as I gaze on the remains of what must once have been extraordinary beauty. I have risen on her entrance, and we now stand—my strange visitor and I—staring at each other in silence, with only the little work-table between us.

She is dressed in deepest black of a good texture—I am in rich brown velvet. She is tall and full—truly, as Tynon had described her, "a woman of a fine presence"—I am small and very slight. Her eyes are large and dark, and burning—such eyes as belong to the South alone—mine, large too, are grey blue, and soft and calm.

I feel fascinated, and slightly terrified. At last I speak.

"Is there anything I can do? I believe you wished to speak to me!" I venture weakly, and with hesitation."

"I do," says my strange visitor, never removing her piercing gaze from my face. "I also wished to *see* you—*close*. So you are *his* wife, are you? A child, a mere doll!"

I am so taken aback, I can find no reply to make to this speech; every moment renders me more amazed, more thoroughly frightened.

"You are Mrs. Carrington of Strangemore," she goes on in the purest English, but with an unmistakably foreign accent—"well, Mrs. Carrington, I have come here to-day to tell you something I fear will be unpalatable to your dainty ears."

At this instant it occurs to me that I have admitted to my presence, and am shut up with, an escaped lunatic. At this thought my blood curdles in my veins—I move a step backwards, and cast a lingering, longing glance at the bell-handle—watching my every gesture, she immediately divines my intention.

"If you will take my advice," she says, "you will not touch that bell. What I have to say, might furnish too much gossip for your servants' hall. No, I am *not* mad. Pouf! what a fool it is, trembling in every limb! Pray restrain yourself, Mrs. Carrington, you will require all your courage to sustain you by-and-by."

She is speaking very insolently, and there is a fiendish triumph in her black eyes; I can hear a subtle mockery in her tone, as she utters my married name.

"If you will be so kind as to state your business without any further delay," I remark with as much hauteur as I can summon to my aid, "I shall feel obliged."

"Good," says she, with a vicious smile, "you recover. The white mouse has found its squeak. Listen then." She seats herself before the small table that divides us, leans her elbows upon it, and takes her face between her hands. Her eyes are still riveted upon mine, not for a second does she relax the vigilance of her gaze. "Who do you think I am?" she asks, slowly.

"I have not the faintest idea," I reply, still haughty, though thoroughly upset, and nervous.

"I—am—Marmaduke—Carrington's—lawful—wife," she says, biting out the words with cruel emphasis, and nodding her head at me between each pause.

I neither stagger, nor faint, nor cry out—I simply don't believe her. She is mad, then, after all. Oh, if Tynon, or Harris, or anyone, would only come! I calculate my chance of being able to rush past her, and gain the door in safety, but am disheartened by her watchfulness. I remember, too, how fatal a thing

it is to show symptoms of terror before a maniac, and with an effort collect myself.

"If you have nothing better to say than such idiotic nonsense," I return, calmly, "I think this interview may as well come to an end." As I utter this speech in fear and trembling, I once more go slowly in the direction of the bell.

"Oh! must you then see my marriage lines?" says the woman with a sneer, drawing from her bosom a folded paper. "Is there too much of the stage about my little declaration? Come then, behold them; but at a distance, Carita, at a distance."

She spreads open the paper upon the table before me. Impelled by some hideous curiosity I draw near. With one brown, but shapely finger, she traces the characters, and I read with dull eyes the terrible words that seal my fate. No thought of a forgery comes to soothe me, I know in that one long awful moment, that my eyes have seen the truth.

Mechanically I put my hand to seize the paper, but she pushes me roughly back.

"No, no, ma belle," she laughs, coolly; "not that."

"It is a lie," I cry fiercely; "a lie!"

Where now is all my nervousness, my childish terror? My blood flames into life. For the time I am actually mad with passion, as mad as I imagined her a little while ago. A cruel, uncontrollable long-

ing to kill her—to silence for ever the bitter, mocking tones; to shut the vindictive eyes that seem to draw great drops of blood from my heart, takes possession of me. I catch hold of a heavy ruler that lies on a Davenport near, and make a spring towards her.

But I am as an infant in the hands of my opponent; I feel myself flung violently to one side, against a wall, while the ruler falls crashing into an opposite corner.

"Bah!" she cries through her teeth. "Can English blood get warm? I did not believe it until now. So you love the handsome husband, do you? That, after all, is *not* a husband, see you, but a lover. This is *my* house, *Mees!* This is *my* room! Leave it, I command you!"

She laughs long and loudly; but all my fury has died out.

"I do not believe one word of all your vile story," I declare doggedly, knowing I am lying as I speak; "it flavours too much of the melodrama to be real. You are an impostor; but you calculate foolishly if you think to gain money from me by your false tale. You have been seen more than once about these grounds before now——"

"Ay"—interrupting me with a rapid shrug of her finely-formed shoulders—"I pined, I hungered for a sight of your English baby face. I—the mistress of it all—skulked about these walls, and was

hunted through your shrubberies like a common thief. Twice was I near detection; twice through my native cunning I evaded your stupid bull-dogs of men. And each time I hugged myself to think I had the revenge *here*"—laying both hands lightly on her bosom, where the fatal paper once more lies.

"I do not believe you," I reiterate stupidly; "it is nothing but a wicked invention. I am silly to feel even annoyance. My husband will soon be in; then we shall hear the truth."

"We shall—the whole truth. His face will betray it. Then you shall hear of the happy evenings spent in Florence, beneath the eternal blue of the sky, when Carlotta Veschi lay with her dark head reclined upon her English lover's breast. When words of love fell hotly upon the twilight air; when vows were interchanged; when *his* lips were pressed, warmly, tenderly, to—*mine*."

"Be silent, woman!" I cry, passionately, breathing hard and painfully. Oh, the anguish—the torture! I raise my head a little higher, but my hand goes out and grasps unconsciously a friendly chair, to steady my failing limbs.

"Does it distress you, Anima? all these loving details. From *his* lips they will possibly fall more sweetly. *I* am but an interloper: only the despised worm that crawls into the rose's heart. Mine is the hand (unhappy one that I am!) to lay waste the nest of the doves."

"Here he is!" I cry, joyfully, as I hear my husband's footsteps pass the window. The very crunching of the gravel beneath his heel rouses me. Hope once again springs warm within my breast. It is not; it cannot be true. He will send this horrible woman away, and reduce all my ridiculous fears to ashes.

I run to him with unusual eagerness as he enters; and, smiling, he holds out his arms. But even before I can throw myself into them, what is it that comes across his face? What is this awful whiteness; this deadly look of terror? Why does he stagger back against the wall; why do his hands fall lifeless to his sides? Why do his eyes grow large with unearthly horror?

The woman stands where last she stood. She has not moved on his entrance, or made the faintest advance. Though slightly paler, the evil mockery still lingers in her eyes.

She raises one finger slowly, tragically, and points it at him.

"I have found you," she says. "My—*husband!*"

No reply. Both his shaking hands go up to hide his face. I run to him, and fling my arms around his neck.

"Marmaduke, speak!" I cry. "Tell her she lies. Duke, Duke, raise your head, and send her from this place. Why are you silent? Why will you not look at me? It is only I—your own Phyllis. Oh,

Marmaduke, I am horribly frightened. Why don't you tell her to be gone?"

"Because he dare not," says my visitor, slowly. "Well, Marmaduke, have you no welcome for your wife?"

He puts me roughly from him, and going over to her, seizes her by the wrists, and drags her into the full light of the window.

"You fiend!" he hisses, beneath his breath. "It was all false, then, the news of your death? You are alive? You are still left to contaminate the earth? Who wrote the tidings that set me, as I believed, free?"

"I did," replies the woman, quietly. "I was tired of you. Your milk-and-watery affection, even at the very first, sickened me. I wished to see you no more. I had begun to hate you; and so took that means of ridding myself of you for ever. But when I heard of the rich uncle's death—of the money, the grandeur, all that had come to you, I regretted my folly, and started to claim my rights. I am here—repudiate me if you can."

I have crept closer; I am staring at Marmaduke. I cannot, I will not, still believe.

"Marmaduke, say she is not your wife," I demand, imperiously.

"Ay, say it," says the woman, with a smile.

I go nearer, and attempt to take his hand.

"Duke, say it, say it!" I cry, feverishly.

"Do not touch me!" exclaims he, hoarsely, shrinking away from me.

I feel turned to stone. Not faint or sick, only numbed, and unable to reason. The Italian bursts into a ringing laugh.

"What a situation!" cries she. "What a scene! it is a tragedy, and the peasant is the heroine. I—Carlotta—am the wife, while the white, delicate, proud miladi is only the mist——"

Before the vile word can leave her lips Marmaduke's hand is on her throat. His face is distorted with passion and madness; there is upon it a settled expression of determination that terrifies me more than all that has gone before. His thin nostrils are dilated with rage. His very lips are grey. Already the woman's features are growing discoloured.

"Marmaduke!" I shriek, tearing at the hand that pinions her to the shutter, "Marmaduke, for *my* sake—remember—have pity. Oh! what is it you would do?"

By a superhuman effort my weak fingers succeed in dragging his hand away. He shivers, and falls back a step or two, while the Italian slowly recovers.

"Would you murder me?" she gasps. "Ah! wretch—dog—beast! But I have a revenge!"

She stalks towards the door as she utters this threat, and quickly vanishes.

I turn to my—to Marmaduke.

"It is true?" I ask.

"It is true," he replies, and as he speaks I can scarcely believe the man who stands before me, crushed, and aged, and heart-broken, is the same gay, handsome young man, who entered the room all smiles a few minutes ago.

"If *she* is your wife, what am *I*?" I ask, with unnatural calmness.

"Phyllis! Phyllis! my life! forgive me," he cries, in an anguished tone; and then the room grows suddenly dark—I fall heavily forward into the blackness, and all is forgotten.

* * * *

When I recover consciousness, I find myself in my own room, lying upon my bed. The blinds are all drawn down, to cause a soothing darkness. There is a general feel of dampness about my hair and forehead—somebody is bending anxiously over me. Raising my eyes in languid scrutiny, I discover it is my mother.

"Is that you, mamma?"

"Yes, my darling."

"I did not know you were coming to-day. How is it you are here just now? and why am I lying on my bed?"

I uplift myself upon my elbow, and peer at her curiously. Her eyelids are crimson; her voice is full of the thick and husky sound that comes of much weeping.

"What has happened? Why am I here?" I repeat.

"You were not well, dearest. A mere faint, nothing more; but we thought you would feel better if kept quite quiet. I was driving over to see you today, and very fortunately arrived just as I was wanted. Lie down again, and try to sleep."

"No, I cannot. What has vexed you, mother? You have been crying."

"Oh no, darling," in trembling tones; "you only imagine it—perhaps it is the uncertain light."

"Nonsense," I insist, angrily; "you know you have. I can see it in your eyes—I can hear it in your voice. Why do you try to deceive me? Something has happened—I feel it—and you are keeping it from me. Let me think——"

With a nervous gesture mother raises a cup from a table near, and puts it to my lips.

"Drink this first and think afterwards," she says; "it will do you good."

"No, I shall think first. There is something weighing on my brain, and on—my heart. Why don't you help me to remember?"

I put my hands to my head in deep perplexity. Slowly, slowly the truth comes back to me; slowly all the past horrible scene revives itself.

"Ah!" I gasp, affrightedly, "I remember! I know it all now. I can see her again! She said—— But," seizing mother's wrists fiercely, "it is not true,

mother? Oh, mother! say it is not true! Oh! mother! mother!"

"Phyllis, my child—my lamb! what shall I say to comfort you?"

"Deny it," I cry, passionately flinging my arms around her waist, and throwing back my head that I may watch her face. Poor face! so filled with the bitterest of all griefs—the want of power to solace those we love. "Why do you cry? Why don't you say at once it was a lie? You are as bad as Marmaduke; *he* stood there too, deaf as a stick or a stone to my entreaties. Oh, will no one help me? Oh! it is true then—it is true."

I push her from me, and burying my head on my arms, rock myself to and fro, in a silent agony of despair. Not a sound breaks the stillness, but mother's low suppressed sobbing; it maddens me.

"What are you crying for?" I ask, roughly, raising my tearless face; "my eyes are dry. It is my sorrow, not yours—not anyone's. What do *you* mean by making moan?"

She makes no answer, and my head drops once more upon my arms. I continue my ceaseless, miserable rocking. Again there is silence.

A door bangs somewhere in the distance.

"I will not see him," I cry, starting up wildly. "Nothing on earth shall induce me. I cannot, mother. Tell him he must not come in here."

"Darling, he is not coming. But even if he were,

Phyllis, surely you would be kind to him. If you could only see his despair. He was quite innocent of it. Phyllis, I implore you, do not foster bitter thoughts in your heart towards Marmaduke."

"It is not that. You mistake me. Only—it is all so horrible—I fear to see him. Yesterday he was my husband—no—no—I mean I thought he was my husband; to-day what is he?"

"Oh! darling, try to be calm."

"I am calm. See, my hand does not even tremble," holding it up before her. "Oh! what have I done, that this should happen to me! What odious crime have I committed, that I should be so punished? Only six months married—*married*, did I say?—I must learn to forget that word."

"Oh, Phyllis, hush! If you would but try to sleep, my poor love."

"Shall I ever sleep again, I wonder, with that scene before me always? It has withered me. Her eyes, how they burned into mine! her very touch had venom in it. And yet why should I be so hard on her, poor creature? Was she not in the right? He is *her* husband, not mine. She has the prior claim. *She* is the deserted wife, while I am only——"

"Phyllis! Phyllis!"

"And all my life before me," I cry, with passionate self-pity, clasping my hands, "how shall I bear it? What are those words, mother? Do you recollect? Something beginning,—

" 'So young, so young,
I am not used to tears at night,
Instead of slumber; nor to prayer
With sobbing lips, and hands out-wrung.' "

"Phyllis, do you want to kill me?" says mother, her sobs breaking forth afresh.

"Poor mother, do I make you sad? Do your tears relieve you? I suppose so, as I have none. I think my sorrow is too great for that. It was like a dream, the whole thing. I could not realise it then. It is only now I fully understand how alone I am in the world."

"My own girl, you still have me."

"And so I have, dear, dearest mother, but I will live alone for all that. Disgrace has fallen upon me, but I will not ask others to bear my burden. Was it not well Dora's marriage took place last month? my position cannot affect hers now."

"Oh! Phyllis, do not talk of disgrace. What disgrace can attach to you, my poor, innocent child?"

"I cannot lie here any longer," I say, abruptly, getting off the bed; "I shall go mad, if I stay still and think. And—my hair," fretfully—"it has all come down, it must be settled again. Oh! no; I cannot have Martha; she would look doleful and sympathetic, as if she knew everything, and I should feel inclined to kill her."

"Let me do it, darling. Your arms are tired," says mother, meekly, and proceeds to shake out

and comb with softest touch the heavy masses of hair that only yesterday I gloried in. Even this morning, when it lay all about my shoulders, how happy I was!

"Do you know, mother," I say, drearily, "it seems to me now, as though between me and this morning a whole century had rolled?"

"Phyllis," says mamma, earnestly, "I don't like your manner. I don't like the way you are taking all this. A little while ago your grief was vehement, but natural, now there is an indifference about you that frightens me. You will be ill, darling, if you don't give way a little."

"Ill? with a chance of dying you mean? Why that would be famous. But don't fear, mother, no such good fortune is in store for me! I shall probably outlive everyone of you." I laugh a little. "How nicely you use the brush, you do not drag a single hair. And it is nearly seven months now, since last you brushed my hair; and I was then almost a child, was not I? And we never thought, you and I, such bad luck was in store for the poor little scapegrace of the family. Yes, roll it back like that. Oh! did you ever see so miserable a face? I hate it," making a faint grimace at my own image in the glass, "how white it is."

"Too white?"

"Yes, but not so white as hers; and her eyes, so large and black. I have read that Italian women

are revengeful, I think if she had had a knife then she would have killed me."

"Phyllis, you are overwrought. Darling, do let me put you into bed again, and try to swallow some of this composing draught. Or see, this comfortable couch, will you lie here?" coaxingly.

"Do you think she will come back again, mother? that would be worse than anything. She muttered some bad words, or some threat as she was leaving the room; and yet do you know it was my hand kept Marmaduke from murdering her. Murder! Has not that an ugly sound, poor Duke, he was half mad I think!"

"Of course he was; do not let your mind dwell on it. Look what large soft cushions; only put your head on them and you will sleep. And I will tuck you up, and sing to you, and imagine you my own little baby Phyllis again."

"But what an old, old baby! I feel as old as yourself to-day. This morning I remember I laughed for nearly five minutes without stopping over some absurd story of Martha's. I fear I offended her at last, but I am punished now—much laughing, you know, goes before crying. Shall I cry much, later on, I wonder?"

"No, no, my love, I hope not. Come, if you will lie down here, and drink this, I will lie with you, and then you will not be lonely."

"No, I want to walk. I feel so restless. Where

is my hat, mother, can you see it? Ah! you are not much better than Martha after all, she never knows where anything is. How light my head feels. Do you pity me, mother—is it not hard to bear. Ah!——" I fling my arms above my head, and fall senseless at her feet.

* * * * *

It is the evening of the same day; a dark sullen December evening, dark as the thoughts that throng my breast. I feel unsympathetic, cold, almost dead. Much as I have tried during these past few hours, I cannot quite reconcile myself to the idea that it is I—I myself—who am principally concerned in all this horror that has taken place.

I argue in my own mind, I represent the case as for a third person. I cannot realise that the one most to be pitied is I, Phyllis—Phyllis *what?*"

I have at length consented to see Marmaduke, and am lying upon a sofa in a hopelessly dishevelled state, as he enters. I have not shed a single tear, yet the black hollows beneath my eyes, might have come from ceaseless weeping.

I half rise as he comes across the room, yet cannot raise my head to meet his gaze. I dread the havoc, despair, and self-torture will have wrought in his face. He moves slowly, lingeringly, until he reaches the hearth-rug, and there stands, and regards me imploringly. This I feel and know, though through some other sense besides sight.

"Will you not even look at me?" he says presently, in a changed almost agonised tone.

I force my eyes to meet his, but drop them again almost immediately.

"Is forgiveness quite out of the question?"

"No," I return, "of course I forgive you. It was not your fault. There is nothing to forgive. But in the first instance you deceived me—that I feel the hardest." Even to myself, my voice sounds cold and strange.

"I acknowledge it. But how was I to tell this would be the end of it. It appeared impossible you should ever know the truth. It was only known to myself,—and one other——"

"And that was——?"

"Mark Gore. The woman, as I believed, was dead, and who could betray the secret. The whole miserable story was so hateful to me, that to repeat it to you—whom I so devotedly loved—was more than I had courage for. How could I tell you such a sickening tale? How could I watch the changes—the dislike, it might be, that would cloud your face as I related it? By your own confession, I knew you bore me none of that love that would have helped me safely through even a worse revelation, and I dreaded lest the bare liking you entertained for me should have an end, and that you, a young girl, would shrink from a widower, and the hero of such a story."

"Still it would have been better if you had spoken; I can forgive anything but deceit."

"Once or twice I tried to tell you the only secret I had from you, but you would not listen, or else at the moment spoke such words as made me doubt the expediency of ever mentioning the affair at all. But now that it is too late, I regret my duplicity, or cowardice, or whatever it was that swayed me."

"Too late, indeed," I repeat, almost mechanically.

After a minute or two, he says in a low voice—

"Have you no interest, no curiosity, that you do not ask; will you let me tell you now all the real circumstances of the case?"

"What need," I answer, wearily, "of course it is the old story. I seem to have heard it a hundred times. You were a boy, she was a designing woman; she entrapped you—it is the whole thing."

"I was no boy; I was an over-honourable man. She was an Italian woman, with some little learning, of rather respectable parentage, and who (a wonderful thing amongst her class) could speak a good deal of English. She was handsome, and for the time I fancied I loved her. No thought of evil towards her entered my heart; I asked her to marry me, and the ceremony was performed, privately but surely, in the little chapel near her home; her

brother being the principal witness. Hardly a month had passed before I fully understood the horrible mistake I had made; before I learned how detestable was the woman with whom I had linked my fate. Her coarse, harsh manner; her vile insolent tongue; her habits of drunkenness; nay more, her evident preference for a low illiterate cousin, were all too apparent. I left her; she declaring herself as glad to see the last of me, as I was to be rid of her. Does the whole thing disgust you, Phyllis?"

He pauses, and draws his hand wearily across his forehead.

I shake my head, but make no further reply; and presently he goes on again in a low tone.

"I was, comparatively speaking, poor then; yet, out of the allowance my uncle made me, I sent her regularly as much, indeed more, than I could afford; but dread of discovery forced me to be generous. Then one day came the tidings of her death. Even now, Phyllis—now, when I am utterly crushed and heart-broken—I can feel again the wild passion of delight that overcame me, as I pictured myself once more free. Again I mixed with the world I had for some time avoided, and was received with open arms, my uncle's death having made me a rich man, and then—then I met you. Oh, Phyllis! surely my story is a sad one, and deserving of some pity."

"It is sad," I say, monotonously, "but not so sad as mine."

Coming over, he kneels down beside my sofa, and gently, almost fearfully, takes one of my hands in both his.

"Oh, not so sad as yours, my poor love, my own darling," he murmurs, painfully, "but still unhappy enough. To think that I, who would willingly have shielded you with my life, should be the one to bring misery upon you."

He hides his face upon the far edge of the cushion, on which my aching head is reclining. I can no longer see him, but can feel his whole frame trembling with suppressed emotion. With some far-off, indistinct sensation of pity, I press the hand that still holds by mine.

Presently I rouse myself, and rising into a sitting posture, I fix my dull eyes upon the opposite wall, and speak—

"I suppose it is to my old home I must go."

As though the words stung him, Marmaduke gets up impetuously, and walks back to his former position upon the hearth-rug. I notice that his face has grown, if possible, a shade paler than before. A sudden look of fear has overspread it.

"Yes, yes, of course you shall go home for a little time if you wish it," he says, nervously.

"Not for a little time, for ever," I return. A horrible pain is tugging at my heart.

"Phyllis," cries he, almost fiercely, "what are you saying? you cannot mean it. For ever! Do you know what that means? If you can live without me, I tell you plainly, I would rather ten thousand times be dead, than exist without you. Are you utterly heartless, that you can torture me like this? Never to see you again, is that what you would say?" Coming nearer, so close that he touches me, while his eyes seek and read with desperate eagerness my face—"speak, speak, and tell me you were only trying to frighten me."

"I cannot, I meant just what I said," I gasp, consumed by a sudden dread of I scarce know what. "Why do you disbelieve, what other course is open to me?"

"Listen," trying to speak calmly, and seizing hold of my hands again, "why should you make this wretched story public? As yet, no one is the wiser, you and I alone hold the secret. This woman, this *fiend*, will go anywhere, will do anything for sufficient money, and I can make it worth her while to be for ever silent;—when she returns to Italy, who then will know the truth?"

"The truth—ah! yes——"

"Are you not my wife? Has not my love bound you to me by stronger ties than any church laws? Why should this former detested bond ruin both our lives?"

"A little while ago you spoke of yourself as an

'over-honourable' man. Is what you now propose honourable or right? Marmaduke, it is impossible. As our lives have shaped themselves, so must they be. I cannot live with you."

"Think of what the world will say. Phyllis, can you bear their cruel speeches? It is not altogether for my own sake I plead, though the very thought of losing you is more than I can bear. It is for you, yourself, I entreat; remember what your position will be. Have pity upon yourself."

"No, no, I will not listen to you. I will not, Marmaduke."

He flings himself on his knees before me.

"Darling, darling, do not forsake me," he whispers despairingly.

"Let me go," I cry, wildly. "Is this your love for me? Oh, the selfishness of it. Would you have me live with you as——"

"Be silent!" exclaims he in a terrible voice. A spasm of pain contracts his face. Slowly he regains his feet.

"You madden me," he goes on in an altered tone. "I forget that you, who have never loved, cannot feel as I do. Phyllis, tell me the truth, have you no affection for me? Are you quite cold?"

"I am not!" I cry, suddenly, waking from my unnatural apathy, and bursting into bitter tears, the first I have shed to-day. As the whole horrible truth comes home to me, I rise impulsively, and

fling myself into my husband's arms—for my husband he has been for six long months. "I do love you, Duke—Duke; but oh! what can I do? What words can I use to tell you all I feel? I am young, and silly, and ridiculous in many ways, I know; but yet there is something within me I dare not disobey; something that makes me know the life you propose would be a life of sin, one on which no blessing could fall. Help me, therefore, to do the right, and do not make my despair greater than it is."

He is silent, as he holds me clasped passionately to his breast.

"We must part," I go on, more steadily. "I must leave you; but, oh! Duke, do not send me home. I could not go there."

I shudder violently in his embrace at the bare thought of such a home-coming. How could I summon courage to meet all the whispers, the suppressed looks, the very kindnesses, that day by day I should see."

"And here I could not stay, either," I sob, mournfully; "memory would kill me. Duke, where shall I go? Send me, you—somewhere."

I wait for his answer with my head pillowed on his chest. I wait a long time. Whatever struggle is going on within him takes place silently. He makes no sign of agony; he does not move; his very heart, on which I lean, has almost ceased to beat.

At length he speaks, and as the words cross his lips I know that he has conquered, but at the expense of youth, and joy, and hope.

"There is Hazleton," he says; "it is a pretty place. It was my mother's. Will you go there? And——"

"Yes, I will go there," I answer, brokenly.

* * * * *

"What servants will you take with you?" he asks me presently, in a dull, subdued way; all impatience and passion have died within him.

"I will take none," I reply, "not one from this place. You must go to Hazleton and get me a few from the neighbourhood round it. Just three or four, who will know nothing of me, and seek to know nothing."

"Oh, my darling! at least take your own maid with you, who has known you all your life. And Tynon, he is an old and valued servant; he will watch over you, and take care of you."

"I will not be watched," I say, pettishly; "and I detest being taken care of. I am not ill. Even when a heart is sick unto death, there is no cure for it. And I would not have Tynon on any account. Every time I met his eyes I would know what he was thinking about. I would read pity in every glance and gesture, and I will not be made more wretched than I am by sympathy."

"Then take Martha. You know how attached to you she is——"

"No; I will have no one to remind me of the old life. Do not urge me, Duke. Give me my own way in this. Believe me, if you do, I shall have a far better chance of—peace."

"I wish, for your sake, I was dead," says Duke, hoarsely.

At this I begin to cry again, weakly—I am almost worn out.

"You will at least write to me, now and then, Phyllis?"

"It will be better not."

"Why? I have sworn not to see you again, but I must and will have some means of knowing whether you are dead or alive. Promise me that twice a year, once in every six months, you will let me have a letter. It is only a little thing to ask, out of all the happy past."

"I promise. But you—will you stay here?"

"Here?" he echoes, bitterly; "what do you take me for? In this house, where every room, and book, and flower, would remind me of your sweet presence? No, we will leave it together; I shall look my last on it with you. I will not stay to see it desolate, and grey, and cold, without its mistress. You must let me be your escort to your new home, that people may have less to wonder at."

"And where will you go?"

"Abroad—India, Australia, America, anywhere, what does it matter. If I travelled to the ends of the earth, I could not fly my thoughts."

"And—" timidly, "what of *her*?"

"Nothing," he answers, roughly; "I will not talk of her again to *you*."

There is a low, apologetic knock at the door. Instantly I seat myself on the sofa in as dignified an attitude as I can assume, considering my hair is all awry, and my eyelids crimson. Duke lowers the lamp prudently, and falls back to the hearth-rug, standing with his hands clasped carelessly behind him, before he says in a clear distinct tone—

"Come in."

"Dinner is served," announces Tynon softly, with the vaguest discreetest of coughs. How is it that servants always know everything?

"Very good," returns Marmaduke in his ordinary voice. "Let Mrs. Vernon know." Then, as though acting on a second thought—

"Tynon."

"Yes, sir."

"It may be as well to let you know now that Mrs. Carrington and I are leaving home next week for some time."

"Indeed, sir? yes, sir." Tynon's face is perfectly impassive, except at the extreme corners of the mouth, these being slightly down-drawn indicate regret, and some distress.

"We both feel much disappointed at being obliged to leave home at this particular time, the Christmas season being so close at hand, but the business that takes us is important, and will admit of no delay. I shall leave behind me the usual sum of money for the poor, with an additional gift from Mrs. Carrington, which I will trust you and Mrs. Benson (the housekeeper) to see properly distributed."

"Thank you, sir, it shall be carefully attended to."

"I am quite sure of that," kindly. Then with a return to the rather forced and stilted manner that has distinguished his foregoing speech, he goes on: "it is altogether uncertain when we shall be able to come back to Strangemore, as the business of which I speak will necessitate my going abroad; as Mrs. Carrington's health will not allow her to accompany me, and as she has been ordered change of air, she will go to Hazleton, which she has not seen, and await my return there. You quite understand, Tynon?"

"Perfectly, sir," replies the old butler, with his eyes on the ground. And as I watch him, I know how perfectly indeed he understands, not only what is being said, but also what is not being said.

Duke, weary of lying, draws his hand across his forehead, "You will please let the other servants know of our movements; although my absence may be more prolonged than I think, I shall wish them

all to remain as they now are, so that the house may be in readiness to receive us at any moment. But," turning his gaze for the first time fully upon Tynon, and speaking very sternly, "I will have no whispering or gossiping about things that don't concern them, mind that. I leave you in charge, Tynon, and I desire that all such conduct be punished with instant dismissal—you hear?"

"Yes, sir, you may be sure there shall be no gossiping or whispering going on in this house."

"I hope not." Then, having noticed the quavering voice and depressed air of this old servitor, who has known him from his youth up; he adds more gently, "You may go now. I know I can trust you. I do not think I have any more directions to give you at present."

Tynon bows in a shaky, dispirited way, and leaves the room; outside in the dusk of the corridor, I can see him put his hand to his eyes. But he is staunch, and even now compels himself to turn and say with deference, and with a praiseworthy show of ignorance of what the preceding conversation may mean,

"I hope you will excuse my mentioning it, sir, but if there is one thing beyond another, that raises Mrs. Cook's irritableness, and makes her perverse towards the rest of the household, it is to hear the soup was allowed to grow cold."

"All right, Tynon, Mrs. Harrison's nerves shall not be upset this evening, we will go down now," says

Duke with a smile—a very impoverished specimen of its kind I must own, but still a smile.

I rush into the next room, my dressing-room is off my boudoir, and having bathed my poor eyes, and hastily brushed my hair, and given myself a general air of prosperity, make for the dining-room. On the stairs we encounter mother, looking so pale, and wan, and almost terrified, that I take my hand off Marmaduke's arm, and slip it round her waist. It will never do for her to present such a woful countenance to the criticism of servants.

"Try to look a little more cheerful, darling," I whisper, eagerly, "it will not be for long; as it has to be gone through, let us be brave in the doing of it."

She looks at me with a relieved astonishment, and truly the strength of will that bears me through this interminable evening, amazes no one so much as myself.

* * * * *

Hazleton down by the sea, I have gained your shelter at last. Only yesterday, Marmaduke and I finished our miserable journey here, and took a long, a last, farewell of one another.

How can I write of it, how describe the anguish of those few minutes, in which a whole year's keenest torture was compressed? How paint word by word the mad, but hopeless clinging, the lingering touch of hands that never more should join, the despair, the passion of the final embrace?

It is over, and he is gone, and I have fallen into a settled state of apathy, and indifference to what is going on around me, that surely bears some resemblance to a melancholy madness.

Hazleton is a very pretty, old-fashioned house about half the size of Strangemore—with many straggling rooms well wainscoted almost three parts up each wall. Some of the floors are of gleaming polished oak, some richly, heavily carpeted; it is a picturesque old place, that at any other time, and under any other circumstances, would have filled me with admiration.

Afar off one can catch a glimpse of the sea. From the parlour windows it is plainly visible, in the other rooms a rising hill, and in summer the foliage, intercept the view. In reality, it is only a mile and a half distant from the house, so that at night when the wind is high, the sullen roar of it comes to the listening ear.

The few servants who have had the house in charge have been retained, three more have been added. These have evidently made up their minds to receive me with open arms, but as a week passes, and I show no signs of interest in them or their work, or the gardens, or anything connected with my life, they are clearly puzzled and disappointed. This I notice in a dull wondering fashion. Why can they not be as indifferent to me as I am to them?

All the visitors that should call, do call—it is

not a populous neighbourhood, but as I decline seeing them, and do not return their visits, the would-be acquaintance drops. On Monday, the vicar, a slight, intellectual-looking man, rides up to the door, and being refused admittance, leaves his card, and expresses his intention of coming again some day soon. Which message being conveyed to me by the respectable person who reigns here as butler, raises my ire, and induces me to give an order on the spot, that never, on any pretence whatever, is anyone—vicar or no vicar—to be admitted to my presence.

Sunday comes, but I feel no inclination to clothe myself, and go forth to confess my sins, and pour out my griefs in the house of prayer. All days are alike to me, and I shrink with a morbid horror from presenting myself to the eyes of my fellows. In this quiet retreat I can bury myself, and nurse my wrongs, and brood over my troubles without interference from a cruel world.

I find some half-finished work amongst my things, and taking it to my favourite room, bend over it hour by hour; more often it falls unheeded on my lap, while I let memory wander backward, and ask myself sadly, if such a being ever really lived, as wild, merry, careless Phyllis Vernon.

The days go by, and I feel no wish for out-door exercise. My colour slowly fades.

One morning, the woman who has taken Martha's place, and who finds much apparent delight in the

binding and twisting of my hair into impossible fashions, takes courage to address me.

"The gardens here, ma'am, are so pretty, the prettiest for miles round."

"Are they? I must go and see them."

"'Deed m'm, and it would do you good. A smart walk now once in a way is better'n medcin, so I'm told. And the grounds round here is rare and pretty to look at, though to be sure winter has a dispiritin' effect on everything."

"It is cold," I say, with a shiver.

"It is m'm, surely,"—leaving the mighty edifice she is erecting on the top of my head to give the fire a vigorous poke—"but with your fur cloak and hat you won't feel it. Shall I bring them to you after breakfast, ma'am?"

"Very well, do," reply I, with a sigh of resignation.

Much pleased with her success, the damsel retreats, and, punctually to the moment, as I rise from my breakfast table, appears again armed with cloak, and gloves, and hat. Thus constrained I sally forth, and make a tour round the gardens that surround what must be for evermore my home.

And very delicious old gardens they are, as old-fashioned as the house, and quite as picturesque. There is a total want of method, of precision in the arrangement of them, that instinctively charms the eyes. I wander from orchard into flower-garden,

and from flower-garden on again to orchard, without a break of any sort; no gates divide them; it is all one pretty happy medley.

The walks, though scrupulously neat, are ungravelled, and here and there a dead leaf, crisp and dry, displays itself. The very trees, though bereft of leaves, do not appear so foolish, so melancholy in this free land of theirs, as they always look elsewhere.

I feel some animation creeping into my blood, my step is more springy; at the garden gate the father of all this sweetness steps up to me. He is a rosy-cheeked, good-humoured looking man, a brilliant contrast to the unapproachable Cummins; he presents me with a small bouquet of winter flowers.

"I am proud to see you, ma'am," he says, with a touch of interest in his tone. "I am sorry I have nothing better worth offering you than these ere." He tenders the bouquet as he speaks—a very marvel of a bouquet, considering the time of year.

"Thank you," I say, with a gracious smile, born of my brisk and pleasant promenade, "it is lovely. It is far prettier in my eyes than a summer one, because so unexpected."

I pass on, leaving him, bowing and scraping and much gratified, in the middle of the path, with the unwonted smile still upon my lips.

But as evening draws on, this faintest glimmer

of renewed hope dies, and I sink back once more into my accustomed gloom.

* * * * *

"What will you please to order for dinner to-day, mum?" asks cook from the doorway. I have never yet given directions for that meal, much to this worthy creature's despair, whose heart and thoughts are in her stew-pans.

I glance up with languid surprise.

"Anything you please," I say; "you are always very satisfactory. I told you I would leave everything to you. Why do you ask me to-day in particular?"

"Law, mum, sure it's Christmas Day, and I thought maybe as 'ow——"

"Christmas Day, is it?" I exclaim, curiously; "then I have been a whole fortnight in this place."

"Yes, mum. A whole fortnight and one day, by five o'clock this hevening, precisely. I took the liberty of asking you to order dinner for this one night, thinking as you might put a name to something or other dainty that you fancies."

"Indeed, I have no choice, cook, and I am not at all hungry."

"Likely enough, mum, considering it is now only twelve o'clock; but for a lady like yourself as eats no luncheon to speak of, you will for certain be starved by seven."

"I thought a Christmas dinner never varied, cook. You can have the usual thing, I suppose."

"In course, mum," says cook, undaunted. She is a fine, fat, healthy-looking woman, with a large eye, and a slightly wheezy intonation, as though she were constantly trying to swallow some of her own good things that had inadvertently stuck in her throat. It seems to me that I ought to love this comfortable creature, who is so obstinately bent on fattening me against my will.—"But, whatever folks may say, a plum-pudding for a delicate lady like you, is oncommon 'eavy on the 'art and mind, when bed-hour comes. If you would just say anything that would please you—something light that I might try my hand on—an ice-pudding now?"—this with as near an attempt at coaxing as respect will permit.

But the word ice-pudding calls up old memories; I remember my ancient weakness for that particular confection—my brows contract; a sharp pain fills my breast.

"No, no, anything but ice-pudding," I say, hastily; "I—hate it."

"Dear me, mum, now do you? Most of the quality loves it. Then what would you say—I'm a first-class hand in the pastry line—"

"Make me—a meringue," I murmur, in despair, seeing I shall have to give in, or else go through a list from the cookery book, and fortunately remem-

bering how I once heard a clever housekeeper say there were few sweets so difficult to bring to perfection. But the difficulty, if there is any, only enchants my goddess of the range.

"Very good, mum, you shall 'ave it," she says, rapturously; and retires with flying colours, having beaten me ignominiously.

A month—two months—go by, and still my self-imposed seclusion is unbroken.

Now and again I receive a letter from former friends, but these I discourage. From mother I hear regularly once a week, whether I answer her or not. Poor mother! she has begged and prayed for permission to visit me, to see how time is using me, whether I am well or ill; but all to no avail. I will not be dragged out of the gloomy solitude in which I have chosen to bury myself.

From Dora, on her return from Rome, comes such a kindly, tender letter, as I had not believed it possible the chilly Dora could pen. It is wound up by a postscript from Sir George, as warm-hearted in tone as he is himself. It touches me—in a far-off, curious manner—but I shrink from the invitation to join them that it contains, and refuse it in such a way as must prevent a repetition of it.

Monotonous as is my existence, I hardly note how time flies. March winds rush by me, and I scarcely heed them. But for the hurtful racking cough they leave me as a legacy, ere taking their

final departure, I would not have known they had been amongst us. This cough grows and increases steadily, rendering more pallid my already colourless cheeks, while the little flesh that still cleaves to my bones becomes less and less as the hours go on. It tears my slight frame with a cruel force, and leaves me sleepless when all the rest of the world is wrapped in slumber.

Oh! the weary days, the more than weary nights, when oblivion never comes to drown my thoughts; or, coming, only wraps me in dreams from which I wake, damply cold, or sobbing with a horror too deep for words.

There are times when I fight with Fate, with all that has brought me to this pass; when I cry aloud and wring my hands, and call on Death to rescue me, in the privacy of my own room, from the misery that weighs me down, and keeps me languishing in the dust. But these times are rare, and come to me but seldom—at such weak moments as when a feeling of deadly sickness or overpowering regret gains mastery over me.

In very truth my life is a sad one—a mistake! —a blot!—there is no proper place for me in the universe that seems so great. There is no happiness within me; no spring of hope. I appear to myself a thing apart; innocent, yet marked with a disgraceful brand. With an old writer—whom I now forget—I can truly say,

"For the world, I count it not an inn, but an hospital; and a place not to live, but to die in."

At last I wake to the fact that I am ill—dreadfully ill. There can be no doubt of it; and yet my malady has no name. I have lost all appetite; my strength has deserted me; great hollows have grown in my cheeks, above which my eyes gleam large and feverish. When I sit down, I feel no desire to rise again.

Towards the middle of April I rally a little, and an intense craving for air is ever on me. Down by the sea I wander daily, getting as close to it as my strength will allow, the mile that separates me from it being now looked upon as a journey by my impoverished strength. Somewhat nearer to me than the shore is a high level plain of sand and earth and grass, that runs back inland from a precipice that overlooks the ocean. On this I sit, and, drawing sometimes up to the edge, peer over, and amuse myself counting the waves as they dash on to the beach far, far below.

This plain, forming part of the grounds belonging to Hazleton, possesses the double charm of being easier of access than the strand, and of being strictly private.

It is the 17th of April—a cold day, but fresh, with little sunshine anywhere. I am sauntering along my usual path to my sandy plain, thoughtless of anything in the present, innocent of presenti-

ments, when, suddenly, before me, as though arisen out of the earth, stands Sir Mark Gore.

How long is it since last I saw him?—not months, surely?—it seems more like yesterday. Why do I feel no surprise, no emotion; is the mind within me indeed dead? I am more puzzled by my own unnatural calmness at this moment, than even by an event so unexpected as his presence here.

We both stand still and gaze at each other. As far as I am concerned, time dies—I forget these weary months at Hazleton. I think of our parting at Strangemore. His eyes are reading, examining with undisguised pain, the changes in my face and form. At length, he speaks—

"I hardly thought to meet you here, Mrs. Carrington," he says, advancing, and addressing me in the low hushed tone one adopts towards the sick or dying. He appears agitated.

I regard him with a fixed coldness.

"You, who know all," I say with quiet emphasis, "why do you call me by that name? Call me Phyllis, that, at least, still remains to me."

He flushes crimson, and a pained look comes into his eyes.

"I suppose," I go on curiously, "that last warning you gave Marmaduke at the library door at home—at Strangemore," correcting myself without haste, "had reference to—that woman? Am I right?"

"Yes, I regret now having ever uttered it."

"Regrets are useless, and your words did no harm. Thinking of things since, I knew they must have meant an allusion to her."

"How calmly you speak of it," he says, amazed.

"I speak as I feel," I reply.

There is rather an awkward pause. Now that he is here, the question naturally presents itself—for what reason has he come? At length—

"Will you not say you are glad to see me?" ventures Sir Mark, uneasily.

"I am neither glad nor sorry," is my unmoved return; "I have forgotten to be emotional. I believe my real feeling just now is indifference. Considering how unlooked-for is your presence here, it astonishes even myself that I can call up so little surprise. Curious, is it not? You look thin I think, and older—not so well as when last we met."

He grows a shade paler.

"Do I?" Then, drawing a hard quick breath—"and you, child, what have you been doing with yourself? Except for your eyes, it is hardly you I see. So white, so worn, so changed—this place is killing you."

"It is a very quiet place. It suits me better than any other could."

"I tell you it is killing you," he repeats, angrily. "Better to face and endure the world's talk at once, than linger here until body and soul part."

"I shall never face the world," return I, quietly. "Here is my convent; at least, within its walls I find peace. I see no one, therefore hear no evil talk. I have no wish to be disturbed."

"So you think now; but as time goes on you must—you cannot fail to tire of it. Is it natural to one so young, to lock herself voluntarily away from people of her own age? Why—how old are you, child?"

"Almost nineteen."

"Almost nineteen!" cries he with an unmirthful laugh, "and you may live for fifty years. Are you going to immure yourself within these same four walls for fifty years?"

"I shall not live for fifty years."

"But you may; without excitement of any description, I see no reason why you should not live for a century."

"I shall not live for two years," return I, impressively.

"Phyllis, what are you saying?" cries he, with a shudder.

"The truth—I am dying slowly, and I know it. I am glad of it. I have no energy, no hope, no wish for life. Do you wonder much? At times I have a strange fancy that I am already dead; and then——," I break off, dreamily.

"What an abominable morbid fancy! it is horrible," exclaims Sir Mark, excitedly. "You must see

a doctor without delay; if you were well no such mournful ideas would occur to you."

"Mournful!" I smile a little. "Yes, perhaps so, —when I wake again to find I am alive."

"Nonsense," impatiently. "Why have your people left you so much alone? It is shameful, unheard of. Phyllis, promise me you will see a doctor if I send one."

"Who shall minister to a mind diseased?" say I, still smiling. "No, I will not see your doctor. My ailment has no name; I do not suffer—quiet is my best medicine."

We walk on a little way in silence.

"You do not ask after your friends," says he, abruptly.

"Have I still any left? Well, tell me. I should like to know—how is Marmaduke? and where?"

"Do you not hear from him then," turning to gaze suspiciously in my face.

"No; why should I? We parted for ever when he brought me here. Oh!" with a sudden sharp uplifting of my voice—"how long ago it seems; what years, and years, and years. Tell me, you—where is he?"

"Abroad somewhere; we none of us know where. You think of him incessantly?" still with his eyes searching and reading my face; "it is for him the colour has left your cheeks—the light has died from your eyes? Is it the old life, or is it merely him you regret?"

"I think I regret nothing but my youth," return I, wearily.

"Had you never, at any time, any idea of the truth?" asks he in a low tone, presently.

"Never. How should I? He kept it from me, fearing it would cause me pain."

"He deceived you grossly."

"Yes; but as he thought, for my good. Where was the use of enlightening me? The story was told; the woman was dead—or so he believed. He chose to hide it from me."

"Yes, he hid it from you."

"Well! what of that?" I cry, impatiently; "it was a mistake I think, but a kindly one. He was always thinking of my happiness. It was, perhaps, a worse shock to him than it was to me. He had no faintest thought of her being alive until she stood before him."

He is silent. Something in his manner, in the very way he keeps his eyes bent resolutely upon the ground, chills me. Upon his face a curiously determined expression has gathered and grown.

"No faintest thought," I repeat, sharply, watching him now as keenly as he watched me before, "of course he had not. He had heard of her death years before he ever met me. Had he even doubted on the subject his treachery would have been unequalled. But you cannot think that; it is impossible you can think it—therefore say so!"

Still he is silent—ominously so, as it seems to me. His eyes are still downcast; the evil determination in his face is stronger; his cane is digging deep furrows in the sandy loam.

"Why don't you speak?" cry I, fiercely; "what do you mean by standing there silent, with that hateful expression upon your face? Do you mean to insinuate that there was a doubt in his mind? Look at me, and answer truly: Do you believe Marmaduke knew that woman to be living when he married me?"

I am half mad with suspense and fear. Placing both my hands upon his arm, I put forth all my puny strength and actually compel him, strong man as he is, to meet my gaze.

For a moment he hesitates—a long moment—and then the right triumphs. Though in his own mind he is firmly convinced that can he but endue my mind with this doubt of Marmaduke's integrity, it will substantially aid his own cause, still, being a gentleman born and bred, he finds a difficulty in bringing his lips to utter the miserable falsehood.

"No; I dont believe he did know," he answers doggedly.

"You are sure of this?" I ask, feverishly.

"I would give my oath of it," he replies, with increased sullenness.

"Coward!" murmur I, bitterly, taking my hands from his arm, and turning away.

The excitement of the past few minutes has been terrible to my weakened frame, I feel a vague dizziness—a coldness creeping over me. I am a good half-mile from home; should I faint, there will be nothing for it, but for Sir Mark to carry me there, and to have that man's arms round me for so long a time is more than I could endure. The bare thought of it nerves me to action.

Hurriedly drawing a pin from some secret fold of my dress, I press it deep into my arm, so deep that presently I feel a warm sluggish drop ooze out, and trickle slowly down my flesh, until it sinks into the lining of my sleeve. The little dull pain that follows rouses me, and puts an end to all fear of my becoming insensible.

I draw a long breath, and gradually awaken to the fact that my companion is again speaking.

"In spite of all that, he has wronged you horribly," he is saying with much deliberation. "What has he made you? A woman without a name—one whom the virtuous world would not recognise. He has driven you to bury yourself in this remote corner of the earth, cut off from all that makes life acceptable. He has destroyed your youth, and ruined your health; this is all you have to thank him for."

"The undeniable truth of your words renders them all the more pleasing," I say, bitterly. "Have you come all the way down here to tell me what I know so well already?"

"Yes, and for something more, to ask you to be my wife. Hush! let me speak. I know the answer you would make me, but I do not think you have fully weighed everything. Were you to endure this life you are now leading but for a season, for a year, even several years—I would say nothing; but until this woman, this Carlotta, dies, you can never be his wife. Remember that. And who ever knew anyone to die quickly, whose death was longed for? Look at annuitants for instance, they live for ever—therefore this isolation of yours will know no end."

I am motionless, speechless, from rage and amazement.

"Then by your own words and actions," he goes on in the same measured fashion, suppressing forcibly the fire and agitation that lies beneath his cold exterior, "I have seen a hundred times how little real affection you entertain for Carrington; therefore you are not bound to him by the ties of love. Will you not consider for your own sake? I offer you my name, my rank, everything that I possess. Few men would be tempted to do as much perhaps."

"Sir," say I, feeling half choked, "believe me I fully appreciate all the sacrifices you would make for my sake. Pray spare both me and yourself the recital of them."

"Sacrifices?" interrupts he, eagerly; "no, indeed! I never thought of it in that light. I only meant to

put the case clearly before you exactly as it is, without any false lights. I tell you that so far from my present proposition to you being a sacrifice on my part, I would gladly go on my knees to you this moment, if by doing so I could gain your consent to my plans. I will take you to any part of the world you may choose to name, at home or abroad. I shall be prouder, more blest than I can say, if you will consent to be my wife."

"Have you quite done?" say I, in a tone treacherously calm. "Have you anything more to say? No? Are you sure? Now listen to me. Even if the circumstances were totally different—if I were free as air—if you were the last man on earth, I would not marry you. Whether I do, or do not love Marmaduke, is a question I decline to answer to you. At all events, to my own way of thinking, I am his wife now, and shall ever remain so—until death divides us. But as to whether or not I love you, I feel no hesitation about answering that. I look upon you as the lowest, the meanest of men, to come here behind your friend's back to traduce him, and insinuate lies about him, so as to do him injury in the eyes of the woman he loves. I loathe and detest you, with all my heart."

I am staring him valiantly in the face, as I utter these denunciations. My cheeks are crimson with rage—my eyes are flashing—for the moment all my old strength, and more than my old spirit, has re-

turned to me. I have worked myself through the force of my eloquence into such a passion, that I literally tremble from head to foot. I feel humbled and insulted in my own eyes. All these months of lonely weariness have failed to bring home to me the fact that I am not a married woman. This man's complete acceptance of it has maddened me.

"Thank you," says he, slowly, "but pray do not stop yet. There must be something more you wish to say. Don't mind me—don't take my feelings into consideration."

"I don't," I reply, viciously stamping my foot. "But as it happens, I have said all I ever wish to say to you. You may take from my lips now the very last words I shall condescend to utter to you. Leave me; I hate and despise you!"

"I will," cries he, furiously, losing sight of all the self-imposed restraint that has bound him during the last fifteen minutes. "But I shall take something else too. As you decree, we shall part here never to meet again. I shall at least kiss you in farewell, for the insolence you have shewn me."

His face is full of anger and settled purpose; he is white to the lips—his eyes gleam steadily. There is no sign of wavering or relenting about him.

Oh! how I regret my intemperate speech. An awful fear seizes hold of me. I can almost fancy his committing murder with that look in his eyes. I forget all but a wild desire to escape, and break-

ing from him, I rush madly towards the bare unwalled cliff that overhangs the sea.

But a very little space divides me from the edge as his hand catches and closes on my arm, and drags me roughly backwards.

"Are you mad?" he pants, hoarsely, all the passion gone from his face, leaving only cold horror in its place. "Are you out of your senses? Come home directly. What! would you prefer death to a kiss from me? At last you have effectually put an end to my absurd infatuation. I have no great fancy for any woman's loathing."

So saying he leads me homewards, tired, worn-out, with conflicting emotions. His hand still clutches my arm, as though he fears I will again break loose, and try to accomplish my wicked purpose.

Silent and obedient I go with him, until we reach the small gate by which I generally leave and return.

Here he stops, and putting me inside, shuts the wicket again between us, he being on the outside.

"Now go home," he says, sternly, "and get to bed, you are as white as death—do you hear me?"

I answer "yes," very meekly, feeling somehow frightened and subdued.

"As I shall take very good care not to put myself in your way again," he goes on in the same tone, "I would wish to say before leaving, that in

the future when you stigmatise me, mean and dishonourable, I would have you also remember, that to-day I came to do you the kindest turn any man could do you under the circumstances."

After this remark, without further glance or gesture, he turns and leaves me.

CHAPTER VI.

DURING many days that follow, I lie prostrate, weak as a little child, upon my bed. The shock, the thoughts he has called up, the sure and certain knowledge he has imparted to me, of how that part of the world that knows all my sad story, regards my position, has done much to destroy the poor remains of life and hope that still cling to me almost unconsciously.

A fresh cold has again attacked me, and brought on with increased vigour my old cough. By the middle of May, I am a complete wreck of my once buoyant self.

Rising one Sabbath morning with a curious awesome sense of coming dissolution upon me, I put on my out-door things, and slowly crawl, rather than walk, the little way that separates me from the rustic, ivy-covered church.

The sexton, all prying eyes and gaping mouth,

shows me, heavily veiled as I am, into the Carrington pew, guessing instinctively, though he has never seen me, that the strange Lady of Hazleton has at last given in, and confessed a craving for spiritual consolation.

I kneel and pray as in a dream. The voices of the village choir rise up around me, yet scarcely enter my dulled ear. The Litany, with all its grandeur, all its solemn beauty, fails to impress my sickened soul.

I sit alone, apart, my veil drawn down, my hands clasped upon my knees, turning neither to the right nor left, dimly conscious that the sermon I hear so coldly, is far beyond the average of those usually served up to the congregations of remote, almost forgotten country towns.

When it is over, and my neighbours have well departed, I move down the aisle, and make my way down again to my hermitage, unmoved, unsoftened, by all I have heard and seen.

After the mockery called lunch is at an end, I go to my chosen sitting-room, and getting into the window that overlooks a small inlet of the sea, sit down to my incessant musing.

Presently, far off through the house, comes the sound of impatient knocking. I cannot hear distinctly, so thick are the ancient oaken doors that divide me from the hall; but that it is a double knock I feel small doubt.

This thought, so foreign, being forced upon me, after quite six months of perfect isolation, raises a nervousness that is near akin to fear, within my breast. I wait in palpitating expectancy for what is to follow. Perhaps the vicar, emboldened by my appearance in his church, has determined to strike while the iron, in his opinion, must be hot, and has ridden over to try and gain access to the one hardened sinner who disgraces his parish? Many conjectures rush through my mind, but this takes root. It must be so.

Steps in the hall. Is it possible the man has admitted him on his own responsibility against my orders, or has he forced his way, setting his duty before him as an excuse for his impertinence?

Steps up the stairs, along the passage—steps almost at the door.

I spring to my feet, and push back my chair. Who is it? Who is it I hear? I move still farther into the window, I clutch the curtains to steady myself, I put both my hands up to my head, to stifle the wild sob that rises in my throat.

Nearer, nearer! I lean against the window shutters, and am trembling like one in ague from head to foot, as the door opens, and Marmaduke comes in.

Our eyes meet, and then of a sudden, a great calm falls upon me!

* * * * *

"She is dead," says he, wearily, and flings himself into the chair near which he is standing. He makes no attempt to come nearer to me, to touch me, after that first long eager glance.

As for me, I cannot utter even one poor word. Am I glad? Am I sorry? Am I half mad with joy at the very sight of him? or am I altogether indifferent? I hardly know.

"She is dead." The words keep ringing in my ears. My brain echoes them. "She is dead—dead!"

A clammy moisture, cold and weak, covers my face. My hands fall to my sides lifeless.

"Not," I stammer, "not, you did not!"

"Murder her?" supplies he with a bitter laugh. "No, though I could have done so with a good will, I refrained from that. When I reached her she was lying shrouded in her coffin."

"When did she die?" I ask, "and how?"

"In Florence a fortnight ago, of some malignant fever. I have come here with as little delay as possible to tell you of it."

I glance at him curiously. It is not the old Marmaduke who has come back to me. He is travel-stained, worn, and thin. His voice has lost its old ring, his eye its brightness. There is something dejected in his very attitude.

Such a meeting, after such a parting! I marvel at it inwardly, though conscious I would not have it otherwise.

Alas! how wrongly things have gone with us during our brief married life, from beginning to end! Is it, indeed, true that when the mist and the rain arise to blot our hopes, nor time nor vengeance can suffice to make existence quite the same again.

"How can I tell that she is really dead?" say I, moodily; "you deceived me once. Perhaps some day she will come to life again to defy and torture me."

"I do not think you have any right to speak to me in this way," replies he, quietly. "I may have deceived you passively once in my life by forbearing to mention what would do no good in the telling, and might have caused you grief, or, at least, unpleasantness. But to you or any other being I have never lied. I saw the woman dead with my own eyes. I attended her funeral. I did not think proofs necessary, but if you require it I can produce a witness."

He pauses calmly for a reply, being utterly passionless in his manner, but I give him none. I am still wondering at the change in him—the change in myself.

"You will not believe me guilty of falsehood in such a case," he says. "You surely must see I am speaking the truth."

"I suppose so," I murmur at length. "Poor woman! She did not long outlive her revenge." I

sigh heavily, and my head droops. My thin white fingers clasp and unclasp each other aimlessly. My thoughts are so indistinct I can put them into no shape. The light falls full upon my bent figure, my slight shrunken form.

"Phyllis!" cries Marmaduke, springing to his feet with a sudden, sharp change of tone, "how white you are, how emaciated; how altered in every way! Have you been ill? Oh, my darling!" with a groan, "I have ruined your life, and broken your heart; have I destroyed your health also?"

He makes an impetuous movement towards me, as though he would catch me in his arms.

"Don't do that," I cry, hastily, shrinking farther into the recess of the window; "do not touch me. Remember you are not—my husband."

He stops short, and his eager arms fall empty to his sides. His face grows a shade paler.

"True," he says in a low voice, "I had forgotten that; you do well to remind me. Fortunately it is a matter that can soon be put right."

"Is it?" I question, coldly. "Can anything that has once gone wrong in this world, ever be put right again I wonder."

"This can at all events," regarding me closely. "We must be married again here, and without delay. The few who know our wretched story can be our witnesses, and no one beyond need be a bit the wiser."

"You forget that walls have ears, and that one's sin must always find one out."

"There was no premeditated sin in this case, and"—speaking somewhat curtly—"I do not believe we have been found out. On my way through London coming down here, I sounded a few of my acquaintances on the subject, and all seemed ignorant of the real cause of our separation. However, that is an outside question altogether. The principal thing now is to put oneself beyond the reach of scandal. When will you wish the ceremony, Phyllis? Next week? I fear this being Friday, it will be impossible to arrange it sooner. You will want some of your friends with you."

He is calm again, but is now watching me narrowly.

"I don't know," I say, deliberately, "whether I shall consent to a second marriage. I have grown accustomed to my present life; solitude suits me. Now, I am free; then——"

I have scarcely, I think, rightly calculated the full effect of my words. Striding forward, Marmaduke seizes me by both arms, and turning, forces me to meet his gaze.

"What are you saying?" he cries, fiercely. "What folly is this? Do you know that for all these past months I have been half mad, when thinking of the blight I have brought upon your honour; and are you so insensible to it that you can hesitate

about accepting this one only way of redeeming it? Your dislike to me must have grown indeed, if at such a time you can shrink from taking my name."

"You misunderstand me. I only shrink from changing my present calm mode of living."

"Do you know what the world will do, when sooner or later it finds out the truth?—as it surely will. Do you know it will cut you, avoid you, wound you in every possible way?"

"Why should I care?" I interrupt, recklessly. "All these months I have done without companionship; there is no reason why in the future I should feel the want of it. Besides, they must see it is through no fault of mine that things have so arranged themselves."

"The world will never be content with the true version of the story. It will not rest without adding to it such false outlines as shall serve to render it more palatable to its scandal-loving ears. You must be indeed ignorant of its ways if you can imagine otherwise. It will ask why, when the obstacle was happily removed, I did not then marry you? What answer will you make to that?"

"Who will question me? If I shut myself away from everyone, how shall I be affected by the surmises of society?"

"You talk like a foolish child, and like a very selfish one. Am I unworthy of any consideration? How shall I bear to look on while society vilifies

you to its heart's content, and leaves you without a rag of reputation? You in your present position—a woman without a name—would have as much chance of admission within your own circle as the veriest Pariah that could be produced. I will not listen to your folly. Even if you hate me I shall insist upon your marrying me."

"How can you insist?" I ask, almost angrily. There is a wild, unsettled throbbing at my heart that puzzles me. I scarcely know what it is I would, or would not wish. All these past months of bitter maddening thought and unbroken loneliness have crushed the life within my breast, and dulled my intellect. "You have no claim upon me."

"No," in a changed, softened voice. "I cannot, indeed, insist, but I can plead—not for myself, Phyllis, but for you. I have put the case before you truthfully, and now entreat you to become my wife, before the real reason for our separation gets abroad. I offer you my name alone. Once having put you in possession of that, I swear I will rid you of my presence for ever if you wish it. Will that content you? Why should the idea be so repugnant to you? unless, indeed——"

Here he pauses. A deep red passionate flush suffuses his face. Placing his hands heavily upon my shoulders, he once more compels me to meet his eyes.

"Unless, indeed, you wish to hold yourself free

for another! If I thought that—if during my absence you had seen anyone else, who——"

"Oh yes!" I interrupt, bitterly; "that is so likely. My married life has been so pleasant — such a prosperous one—that, doubtless, I am in a hurry to try it again. No; believe me, I have fixed my affections on no one during your absence. You are quite safe there. I am as heart-whole as when you left me. I feel no wild desire to throw myself into the arms of any man."

He draws a long, deep breath.

"I would kill you," he says, slowly, "if for one moment I doubted your truth."

"I am hardly worth the killing," return I, with a little, faint, chill smile, looking upon my wasted hands and fragile figure as it reflects itself in an opposite mirror. "Why do you want me so much? I have always been more of a torment to you than a joy, and now I have lost even those few poor little charms I may once have thought I possessed. Ice itself cannot be colder than the woman you wish for the second time to make your own. Why will you not take the chance of escape I offer?" He makes a movement of impatience. "You are unwise in letting it slip. What can you see in me to love?"

"Just what I always saw in you to love. I cannot change. To me, you are my wife—the most precious thing on earth. I will not give you up."

"And you saw her lying dead?" I say, irrelevantly.

"Yes. Have I not told you so already? Why name her to me?"

"Poor soul! How strange she must have looked," I say, dreamily, "lying there with those restless, burning eyes for ever closed. So cold, so white, so still. And you looked down upon her. You were glad to see her there," with a shudder. "You rejoiced that death had stepped in to conquer her, and free you of a chain that dragged. It is a dreadful picture."

"A very natural one, I think. Glad? Yes, I was glad. I was more than that: I was deeply thankful to see her there, powerless to work her wicked will, or pollute the world again. I think—I hope I forgave her; but I was glad to see her dead."

There is a pause. Weary of standing, I sink into a chair. I push back my hair from my forehead, which has begun to throb a good deal, and then let my hands fall listlessly into my lap.

Kneeling down beside me, he takes one of them gently, and strokes it. While he does so, I examine him critically. He has grown more like himself by this time, and but for the hollows in his cheeks, and that his moustache is somewhat darker and longer, I see no great alteration. Verily he has emerged from the fight unscathed, and triumphant in comparison with me.

"Tell me your real objection to my proposal," he says, softly.

"Does my disinclination to be re-married so much surprise you?" I ask, slowly and gravely. "Until I saw you I was a light-hearted child"—I feel that now by force of contrast, though often then I fancied myself ill-used—"I did not know the meaning of real pain, of bitter, enduring shame—that cruellest of all heart-aches. You enlightened me."

"Phyllis—my love—spare me!"

"Here, in this quiet spot, I am at peace. My life is going from me slowly: I have little strength left; do not urge me against my will to enter again into the turmoil and troubles of every-day existence."

"Oh, my darling! don't speak so hopelessly. The melancholy of your life has caused you to exaggerate the evils of your state. Change of air and a good doctor will do wonders for you. Only do not waste time. Delay is often fatal. Phyllis, think of your mother. For her sake, promise to marry me again next Monday."

"Very well, you shall have your way," I return, fairly beaten by his vehemence and determination.

"That is wise, that is sensible!" he says, eagerly. "Any other course you adopted could only be suggested by weak and morbid sentiments. Everything later on shall be as you wish. I will go back to

London by the night mail to arrange matters. So let me know now any things you may require. What friends as witnesses, for instance."

"Harriet and Bébé, I suppose; and Dora and George Ashurst. That will be sufficient, will it not?"

"Your mother?"

"Mamma? Oh, no—oh, no!" I cry, weeping. "Not mamma. She dressed me for my first wedding—I will not have her now. We will both be thinking of that all the time, and it would break her heart. But go to her, and tell her everything. She may find some consolation in your tidings."

"I will go to her to-morrow," he whispers, soothingly. "Afterwards I may go on to Strange-more. Can I bring you anything from there?"

"Send me Martha. I would like to have her with me again."

"I will. Phyllis, my dear, dear girl, why do you cry so bitterly? Of what are you thinking? Surely you must see that I am only acting for the best. If I consented to what you propose I would deserve the name of blackguard; no term would be too harsh to apply to me. Sooner or later, darling, you will acknowledge this, and thank me for my firmness."

"I suppose so," making a violent effort to suppress my sobs. "I am only weak and nervous. Your coming was so unexpected; you should have

warned me. And I have been so quiet here. Remember you have promised that I shall not be disturbed afterwards. You will still leave me to myself. I am fit for nothing else. Oh, this pain—this faintness! Will you ring the bell, and get me a glass of wine?"

He receives me as I totter feebly forwards, and lays me on my couch with the utmost tenderness, and a good deal of trepidation.

Then he rings the bell, and as the man enters gives the order for the wine in the old, clear, quick voice, that seems to me to belong so entirely to Strangemore as to be out of place in this other home.

Not until I am quite recovered, and apparently little the worse for my faintness, does he take his leave; gently kissing my hands, with the assurance that he will be back again with the friends I have expressed a wish for, on the coming Sabbath, he quits the house as quietly as he entered it.

* * * * *

On the Sunday, about the middle of the day, Harriet and Bébé arrive. Dora and George Ashurst follow them in time for dinner. I can see they are all more or less shocked at the changes that have taken place in my appearance, though they refrain from saying so.

Bébé lays herself out to amuse and rouse me by retailing to my languid ears all the most secret

gossip and raciest pieces of scandal from the London world, bit by bit, as it occurs to her.

Lord Harry has been at P—— again, and was well received there, in spite of all that has come and gone. Lord Augustus was jilted by Miss Glanville. George Brooks found the air of Monaco didn't agree with him, and was obliged to exchange into another and less desirable regiment, to see what time and India would do for him. The Duke has made a wretched match in the eyes of the world. But she is awfully good to look at, and he appears provokingly content and happy.

"And he really should not do that, you know," says Bébé; "it isn't good form to be in such high spirits with the tide of popular opinion so dead against you. To see them in the theatre is immense fun. (I don't believe she ever saw one until she married him, and came to town.) He sitting beside her and explaining everything, she all big eyes and pleasurable excitement. His delight in her delight is quite pretty."

Lady Blanche Going has had measles, much to her own disgust and Bébé's enjoyment.

"And how is Chandos?" I ask, presently.

"How can I tell you, my dear, when I see so little of him. He has been making a grand tour somewhere, and raking up old bones, we hear; but the 'where' is wrapped in mystery. Jericho, most probably; it would just suit his dismal disposition."

She speaks heartlessly, but her low, broad forehead wrinkles ever such a little.

"I hope, wherever he is, he will come back safely," I say kindly, ignoring her manner. "I liked him so much. To me he never appeared dismal. And your Chips, what of him?"

"Ah! my poor Chips! He sailed for India a month ago. Such a leave-taking as we had. It would have melted an Amazon. I assure you I very nearly wept, and I certainly kissed him. So did Harriet—twice—who was on the spot doing propriety. I thought that was taking an unfair advantage of me. And he is to shoot every tiger in Bengal, and to send me the skins. At long last I shall be embarrassed by my riches."

After dinner, as we are all assembled in the drawing-room, we become aware of some noise that strongly resembles a scuffle in the hall. It is followed by the sudden opening of the door, and the apparition of Martha on the threshold, flushed with victory, and with her bonnet artistically awry.

Seeing me lying on my sofa, she loses all presence of mind (of which her stock was always small), and, regardless of beholders, rushes forward, and precipitates herself at my feet.

"Oh, Miss Phyllis! Oh, ma'am!" says she, with a lamentable sniff and a nice forgetfulness of manners, as she takes note of my leanness, "Oh,

Miss Phyllis! my dear, my dear! How terrible bad you do look, to be shore!"

Here she falls to kissing and weeping over my hand, finally breaking into loud sobs.

The old spinster appellation, suiting as it does my present position so nearly—albeit unmeant by my faithful handmaiden—raises within me a grim sense of amusement. I check it, however, as being unfit for present company.

"Nonsense, Martha," I say, kindly, "don't go on like that. I daresay now you have come to take care of me, I shall recover my beauty. I shall feel quite insulted if you cry over me any more."

"Martha, come with me," says Bébé, with authority; and Martha, being like all the good ones of her class, instinctively obedient, rises, and leaves the room close at Miss Beatoun's heels.

"What a dreadful habit those people have of giving way to their feelings on every possible occasion," exclaims the usually serene Harriet, wrathfully, as the door closes, coming to my side, to shake up my pillows, and get rid of her irritation.

"Really, yes, it very distressing," chimes in Dora, from the depth of the large arm-chair, in which her small figure is almost lost; she speaks as it behoves a pretty baroness to speak, who now for the first time is made aware of some of the grosser habits of the lower classes. Her tone is perfect—having just the correct amount of surprise and dis-

approval—no more; "And yet that woman always used to strike me, as being such a very properly conducted sort of person."

"Don't be so hard on her, Harry," say I. "Remember she has known me all my life, and has had the care of me ever since I was an infant. She loves me: do not condemn her for that love."

"I was wrong, of course," confessed Harriet remorsefully. "Such attachment being rare, should be considered beautiful. I apologise to your Martha. But I was thinking, not of her, darling, but of you. I did so dread she would excite you over-much, and to-morrow will be such a trying day. Now lie back again, dear, and keep silence while we chat to you."

* * * * * * * *

It is still the morning of my second wedding-day, though a few minutes since I heard some clock chime the quarter to twelve. Habited in the darkest gown my wardrobe can produce, I go down stairs slowly, as in a dream, to the drawing-room, where I find them all assembled before me.

They all glance at me as I enter, and seem relieved on perceiving the total lack of nervousness exhibited by my features. Indeed, it occurs even to myself that I am the only one present thoroughly unimpressed.

Marmaduke is looking pale, but composed, George Ashurst painfully anxious; but that is only

what might be expected of him. The others are all more or less evidently desirous of getting it over in a hurry, and appearing at their ease, in which they fail. The priest, a stranger to me, seems curious.

Bébé comes forward, and taking my hand, leads me before the impromptu altar; Marmaduke steps to my side, and his old college chum commences the service. I have obstinately refused to be re-married by the vicar at home.

Bébé dexterously draws off the wedding ring—that has never yet left my finger since first it was placed there—and thoughtfully hands it to 'Duke. With a shudder he flings it from him into the glowing fire, where it vanishes for ever with a faint, tinkling noise.

"Not that," he mutters in a low tone, and brings out a new one from his pocket.

In a clear voice, utterly devoid of emotion, I answer all the responses. Marmaduke's voice shakes a good deal, and I turn and look at him, surprised. He has had my hand in a warm, close clasp from the moment the prayer-book was opened, and now, too, I notice how he trembles, as for the second time he binds me to him with the little golden emblem of eternity.

Although their voices reach my outward ears; although I myself say what is required of me with perfect calmness, I do not really hear or heed one

word of the ceremony. Thoughts, frivolous and unworthy of the solemnity of the occasion, flit through my brain. I cannot fix my attention on any one thing. I feel no desire to do so.

I wonder vaguely whether, were a widow going to be married again, she would feel as indifferent as I do; than I recollect how, in her case, the bridegroom at least would be a new feature, which would, without doubt, add a little zest to the affair.

How pretty Dora is looking in that navy blue silk and cashmere costume, wonderfully pretty and timid; but then everything always did become Dora.

How nervous that good George appears, and how ridiculously red, why he might almost be painted.

Oh! I have ordered no wedding breakfast. Only fancy! a wedding without a wedding breakfast! How could I have been so remiss. They will all think me terribly stupid. I almost confess aloud this negligence on my part, so little do I heed the sacred words that are falling on the air; but fortunately some still remaining sense of propriety restrains me.

The service is nearly at an end; once more Marmaduke Carrington and I are man and wife. It only waits for the few last sentences to be read.

Looking up, I catch Bébé's eyes. Why are they so wet? And how large they are—how large—why do they grow, and gleam, and burn into mine, like —like———Ah!

I wrench my hand from Marmaduke, and turning towards George Ashurst fling up my arms somewhat wildly.

"Save—save me!" I gasp.

In another moment he has caught me, and I am lying senseless on his breast.

* * * * *

When I come to myself I find them all around me, though most of them stand at a little distance from the sofa. The strange clergyman has vanished; no doubt horrified at such unorthodox behaviour.

Marmaduke, with folded arms, is stationed rather apart from the others, biting his lips and making a violent effort to conceal his fear and emotion.

"Are you better, darling?" asks Bébé, whose arm is under my head, while Dora, supplied with a smelling-bottle, leans over me at the other side—the very sweetest picture of misery.

"I am," I return, feebly; "I don't know what made me so foolish. I did not feel nervous; but I was unlike myself all the morning."

"Poor child!" says Harriet, and down come Dora's tiny fingers, wet with eau de Cologne, upon my forehead.

"I shall be all right in a minute or two," I go on, smiling as I regain strength. "It was too bad of me to frighten you all so much. In the middle of it, I suddenly recollected I had forgotten to order you any breakfast, and the horror of the thought

must have been too much for me. I grow nervous and fanciful in my old age. But I am all right again now."

* * * * *

The day wears on; my wedding guests have had their lunch, and are now in the drawing-room, bidding me farewell before starting for the train that is to bear them away from the newly married couple. How strange, how difficult to comprehend, it all appears!

Dora kisses me with a good deal more than her usual warmth. For once, her pretty show of sympathy is quite sincere. I think at this moment, seeing me so sick, and languid, and devoid of all the unrestrainable joyousness, she, for the first time altogether forgives me my misdoings. George kisses me, too, heartily, and murmurs a few confused congratulatory words. Even to his thick brain it has become apparent how strangely apathetic and indifferent is the bride.

"The continent is the place for you, Phyllis," he says; "anyone can see that with half an eye. Get Carrington to take you there without delay."

I smile faintly, but make no rejoinder.

"Good-bye, darling," whispers my Bébé, stooping over me, and rubbing her cheek with a little purring motion to mine. "Be a good child, and let Marmaduke pet you to his heart's content. You want an overdose now you have been so long alone."

At length they are all gone, leaving the house to fall back into its old silence and calm. All, that is except Marmaduke, who lingers purposely.

"There is no reason," he says, in answer to my enquiring look, "why all those people should know so soon the terms on which we have arranged to live. By degrees it can make itself known."

I lie idly thinking, idly putting together in my mind the strange story of my life. Once looking up, I catch his gaze intently fixed upon me. Twice, three times, I meet it, and then growing irritable through exhaustion and excitement, I say, pettishly,

"Why do you look at me so? I hate being stared at. One would imagine I had more heads than one. Is my appearance so very grotesque, Marmaduke?"

"Was I staring?" he asks, absently, and drawing out his watch examines it anxiously, and then commences a slow promenade up and down the room. He appears distrait, impatient. His eyes are now turned towards the window that overlooks the avenue. It is as though he were expectant of someone's arrival.

"If you are not going until the next train," I remark, snubbily, "you have two full hours to wait; therefore you need hardly calculate minutes so soon. That is the eighth time you have examined your watch within the past ten minutes." Certainly I am not in my most amiable mood.

"I am not returning to London to-night," he says, calmly; "I daresay I can get a bed at that place in the village."

"Surely, considering this is your own house, you need not throw yourself on the mercy of the parish for a bed. Martha will see about a room for you."

"It is your house not mine. I made you a present of it when—sometime ago. However," quickly, "if you invite me, I shall gladly put up here."

Turning his face to the window and away from me, he goes on rapidly—

"To tell you the truth, Phyllis, the chief reason for my staying here now is this, I made an appointment with Sir James Smithson to meet me in this house at four o'clock, to—to take a look at you, and tell me his opinion—as to your state of health."

"Sir James Smithson!" I cry, angrily. "Do you mean to tell me you have brought a doctor to torment me, and make me miserable? This is what comes of marrying you. Oh! why was I so weak as to give in to your wishes! I won't see him—you may be sure of that."

"My darling, be reasonable," with the humblest entreaty. "It will only be for a few minutes. Directly he sees you, he will know the very thing that will set you up again—there is not, there cannot be anything seriously wrong with you. Good advice is all you require. Why will you insist on—on——"

"Dying," I put in, flippantly; "why don't you say it? I shan't go to my grave a moment sooner through your mentioning the unpleasant word."

"You will see him, Phyllis?"

"Oh, if he is really coming, I suppose I must. But I warn you, I shall take no nasty stuffs, politely called tonics, and I will not go abroad."

In this amiable frame of mind I prepare myself to receive the great London doctor. As the servant ushers him into my room, I rise and bow, and am much relieved at finding myself in the presence of a small, homely, jolly-looking little man, with none of the signs of greatness about him.

He examines my chest, and asks a question or two that would certainly suggest themselves to an idiot. He thumps me here, and pats me there—hums and haws, and finally says I want "tone."

"And change of air, my dear Mrs. Carrington. A little pleasure trip now—just a little run through all the old spots we know so well—and then a winter at Pau; or even a degree farther south is all that we want, eh?"

"I will take your tonics," I say, giving in so far, "but," determinately, "I will not take change of air. I am happy here; I will not leave it."

"Dear, dear," ejaculates Sir James, soothingly, giving me another tap—"how people differ! Most young ladies, now, would do almost anything for me, if I would only order them to Pau. Such a

lively place, my dear Mrs. Carrington, so invigorating, so gay; just the very thing for a woman so young, and, let me add, so very charming, as yourself. Now pray do reconsider it."

I laugh, and glance at myself in an opposite mirror. A white face, lean jaws, large unnatural eyes, and pallid lips meet my view. I am altogether unlovely.

"I shall get well enough here," I say, obstinately. "You may order me every nasty concoction you can think of, and I will promise you to drink and eat them all, but go from Hazleton I will not."

"Well, well; we shall see how you get on," replies Sir James, cajolingly, patting my hand. He deals in pats and gentle reassuring nods, but he is a dear old man, and I feel some faint regret that he should leave thinking me unreasonable. He does leave me, however, presently, and seeks my husband, doubtless to pour into his ears all the unpalatable things he is too gallant to say to me.

No more is said to me on the subject. I have evidently conquered. Marmaduke returns to London, taking a run down every now and then to see how I am getting on. I am not getting on at all. I am simply stationary, and am no whit more beautiful to behold than when first his astonished eyes fell upon me, now more than a month ago.

* * * * *

I have wandered listlessly down by the sea. It

is a dreary day, raw, chill, unsummerlike. I shiver vaguely as I go, and wish the night would come to bring us nearer to a more congenial day. All around is mist, and cheerless damp. Grey sky, grey earth, grey clouds that cover land and sea; and oh! grey shadow lying on my heart, how grey art thou!

I feel more than ordinarily depressed and weary. The tide is far out, hardly a breath of wind disturbs the surface of the waters. Seating myself upon a flat rock open my book and commence to read.

But my thoughts will not be controlled. Raising my eyes I look seaward, and wonder at the great pale mist that spreads itself north and south. The horizon sinks into the ocean, and veils of vapoury substance are everywhere.

I sigh, and turning dejectedly from the unvarying scene before me, discover Marmaduke coming towards me across the sands.

"What a curious light!" he says, without greeting of any kind, and sits down upon the pebbles at my feet.

"Very," I answer, stupidly, and then begin to wonder vaguely what has brought him to-day from the busy town, and who has betrayed my favourite hiding-place.

Presently, unconsciously I sigh again, and turn my face from his.

"What is it?" asks he, kindly taking my hand, not affectionately, merely reassuringly. "Tell me the truth now, to-day. Is it that you hate me?"

"I hardly know," I return, wearily. "No; it is not hatred, I think; it is indifference."

We rise, and pace silently homewards.

It is the evening of the same day. My depression of the morning has vanished, leaving a spirit of provocation in its place. I am in the drawing-room, lounging idly in a low cushioned chair, with Fifine, my pet Skye, in my lap. I amuse myself, and gratify the wickedness within me, by practising upon the long-suffering animal such mild torments as disturb without maddening her.

'Duke, under the impression that there is a fire in the grate, stands with his back to the fireplace, and stares at me.

"I wish," he remarks, presently, without premeditation, "you could be induced to take Sir James's advice, and seek change of air. This solitary hole must have a bad effect upon your health."

"I have borne the solitude for so many months, that I daresay I can bear it again. Though, indeed," mischievously, "I had company at times. I could actually have been married, had I so chosen."

"What!" says Marmaduke, in a low tone, flushing.

"I could have been married, had I so chosen," I repeat, with much gusto. "Why do you look so

surprised? I was free, was I not? There was no reason, then, why I should not listen to any man's proposal."

"What do you mean, Phyllis?" sternly.

"Just what I say. A friend of ours, who is aware of all the circumstances of our case, came here one day, and made me a handsome offer of his hand, and what he is pleased to term his heart."

"Did Gore come down here to see you?"

"Not so much for that, as to ask me to marry him."

"The scoundrel!" says 'Duke, through his closed teeth.

"Why should you call him that? On the contrary, there was something generous in his wish to bestow his name upon a woman situated as I was. (No, no, Fifine, you must not lick me. Kiss me if you will, but keep your little tongue in its proper place.) Few men would have done it, I fancy. At all events, it convinced me of the truth and sincerity of his affection for me."

"If you saw so many admirable points in his character, why did you let such a valuable chance of securing them go by?" he asks, bitterly. He is white with anger by this time. I see his emotion, but, being fiendishly inclined at the moment, know no remorse.

"One does do a foolish thing now and again," I reply, calmly, curling Fifine's silky locks the wrong

way, to her infinite disgust. "Afterwards, when it is too late, one repents."

"Am I to understand you repent not having bound yourself for life to that unmitigated villain?"

I burst out laughing.

"Poor Sir Mark!" I cry. "'A scoundrel! a villain!' What next? He tried to do the best he could for me, and gets only abuse in return. Do I repent not having married him? Well—no. At that time I was not particularly in love with matrimony. I had no desire to form new ties—*now*, indeed——"

I break off in pretended confusion. My head bends itself a little on one side. I gaze down consciously into Fifine's lustrous eyes.

"Phyllis," says my husband, with suppressed indignation, "whatever you may really mean by your words, I must beg that for the future I may hear no more of it; I——"

But here the horrible pain in my side comes back to me with its usual acute energy, and mischief fades from me. I push Fifine from my lap, and half rise.

"If you are going to be tragical," I say, "I hope you will leave me. I care neither for Sir Mark Gore, nor for any other man, as you ought to know. Oh my side!" I gasp, pressing my hand to it, and becoming colourless.

My breath and voice fail me. In a moment his kind arms are round me. My head falls helpless

on his shoulder, as though I were a mere child (and, indeed, I am little more in his strong grasp, now sickness has reduced me). He carries me to a sofa, and does for me all that can be done, until the first unbearable anguish is past. Then, with his arm under my head, so as to raise me, he sits waiting in silent watchfulness until rest and ease return.

"You're not rid of me yet," I whisper, with a faint mocking smile, as I notice the fear and misery in his face. "Don't look so wo-begone."

Suddenly he falls on his knees beside my couch, though still supporting me.

"I can't bear it any longer," he says, passionately. "Darling! darling! why will you kill yourself? How can I watch you dying by inches? Have pity for me, if you have none for yourself, and save me from going mad. Phyllis, dearest!" controlling himself by an effort, and trying to speak more calmly, "why can you not look upon me as a cousin, or brother, or father, and let me take you abroad to some place where you can get change of air and scene, and where I may at least be near enough to protect you and see that you want for nothing."

"My *father!*" return I, with an amused laugh; "just compare yourself with papa; think of the inhuman length of his nose. I am afraid it would not do. The world, simple as it has ever shown itself, would hardly accept you in that light. You

grow younger and fresher every day. It is wonderful how little the agony of your mind preys upon your body."

"Phyllis," regardless of this taunt, "let me take you to the south of France."

"Oh, why can't I be let alone," I cry, pettishly. "Why am I to be tormented every hour of the day? I hate dirty, foreign towns; and besides, I know all the journeys I could take would do me no good; but, if I am to get no peace until I consent to leave the only place that pleases me, I may as well do so at once. I will go back to Strangemore."

"You mean it, darling?" cautiously, and without evincing too much joy, lest in my pettishness I should repent, and go back of my words.

"Oh yes, why not? Rather than be perpetually told how obstinate, and self-willed, and sullen I am, I would go to Timbuctoo, or Hong Kong, or any other cheerful spot."

"You would not try a warmer climate first?" with hesitation. "You know Sir James spoke of——"

"No. I will go to Strangemore, or nowhere. I have always had a fancy for it. Even long, long ago—how short a time in reality—when Billy and I used to go nesting and fishing there, we thought it the sweetest spot on earth. I almost think it so still. Is it not odd that I should look with such kindness upon the scene of my greatest trouble?"

"Hush!" with a shudder, "do not let us think of it."

"Why not? I often do. It seems very far away now. *She* had her grievance, too, poor soul."

"When will you start?" abruptly. "Next week? Monday?"

"To-morrow," with decision. "The sooner the better. If I die on the way," with cruel gaiety, "blame yourself for it, and remember you would have it so."

"To-morrow, then," says Duke, with a long sigh.

* * * * *

CHAPTER VII.

As I cross the threshold and enter the old hall at Strangemore a great passionate rush of unrestrainable rapture flows over me. Sudden recollections and emotions threaten to overpower me. I am at home, at rest, at last! With an impulsive movement I put my hand to my heart. Each well-remembered object sends out to me a thousand welcomes. With silent joy I greet them.

Yet, compelled by the strange wilfulness that sorrow and loneliness have bred within me, I conceal all this from Marmaduke, and returning the servants' salutations with a courtesy, kind but sub-

dued, I go slowly up the stairs and into my own room.

All is changed; I pause and gaze around me with much wonder. Carpets, curtains—all are unfamiliar, and where white once mingled with the gold, pale pink appears.

The doors beyond are flung wide. What was formerly Duke's dressing-room is now transformed into a boudoir, while the apartment beyond that again is an exquisitely furnished reception-room.

In the boudoir a small fire burns, and though we may count ourselves now well into the summer, still the bright flames look warm and homelike, and involuntarily I stretch out my hands to their friendly warmth.

A knock at the door. Instead of calling out "come in," I go forward, and opening it, find myself face to face with my husband.

"You will not come down to dinner?" he says, but his tone is a question—almost an entreaty.

"No," I return, ungratefully; "I am too tired. I shall be better alone."

His face expresses disappointment.

"I am sure you are right," he says, moving away; "try to rest, and forget your fatigue."

The remnant of conscience I still retain here smites me.

"My rooms are so pretty," I say, quickly, following him a step or two; "they are lovely. Was

it all your own taste? It was so good of you to do it for me."

"You are pleased?" colouring. "I fancied you would like them changed."

"It was more than good of you," I say again, remorsefully. "You think of everything, and I am always ungrateful."

"Nonsense. Get back your old spirits, and I shall be richly rewarded." Then, with a sudden unexpected movement, "You are welcome home, Phyllis," he says, and bending, presses his lips to mine.

It is the very first caress he has offered me since our second marriage; and now it is the lightest, fleetest thing conceivable. Confused and puzzled, I turn back into my room, with a sensation that is almost fear at my heart. What a cold, unloving kiss. A mere touching of the lips, without warmth or lingering pressure. What if he has ceased to love me.

* * * * *

We toil, through pain and wrong,
We fight, and fly;
We love, we lose, and then, ere long,
Stone dead we lie.
O life! is all thy song
Endure—and die?

The sorrowful despairing words repeat themselves over and over again in my brain. They fascinate and yet repel me. Why must the wretchedness of this world so heavily over-balance the good?

I fling the small volume from me with some impatience as Marmaduke comes in.

He has been studiously cold to me of late; indeed he has shown an open and marked avoidance of my company. It has at times forced itself upon me that he bitterly repents his hasty persistence at Hazleton, and would now gladly sever the tie that binds us—were that possible.

At this moment he is looking bored and *ennuyé* to the last degree, as he goes to one of the windows and stands idly gazing out over the park and woodlands. Not once, as he crosses the room, do his eyes fall upon me.

And yet surely, I am now better worth regarding, than in those first days at Hazleton, when he appeared so anxious to make me his own. It is the latter end of July, warm, sultry, glorious July, and I am once more the Phyllis of old. My cheeks are round and soft and childlike as of yore—my eyes are bright and clear, and have lost their unnatural largeness — my figure has regained its original healthy elasticity; yet Marmaduke heeds me not.

Suddenly, with some abruptness, and without turning to look at me, he says—

"Don't you think it would be an improvement to ask some people down here, eh? It might make things more cheerful for you. Just the old lot you know."

So at last he has made open confession of the

dulness that I feel sure has been consuming him: he has discovered that a very little of my society, taken singly, would go a long way. Well, I too will let *him* see how gladly I shall welcome strangers to our hearth.

"I am so glad you mentioned it," I say, briskly; "I have been wishing of late for some break-in on our monotony. Harriet and Bébé will come I feel sure, and, oh! poor little Chips, I had forgotten he is at present broiling in India; but Chandos will not refuse I think; and Blanche Going, and Sir Mark Gore." These latter I add with some innocent malice.

"Sir Mark Gore is in Norway," replies Duke stiffly.

"Indeed! Then we must put up with his loss. But Blanche Going, where is she?"

"Probably in Jamaica, for all I know, or care," unamiably.

"What an answer! Poor Blanche, if she could only hear you. You should remember, Duke, that flippancy, though excusable in a woman, is simply brutal in a man. Solitude disagrees with you—you grow downright rude."

"If I was rude, I apologise," returns he, carelessly. Then having whistled straight through his favourite air most successfully, and wound up with an elaborate flourish, he walks through the open window on to the balcony outside.

"Very good, ask them all as soon as you like," he says over his shoulder, with a languid nod; "and go for a stroll; the day is too fine to spend indoors."

He runs down the steps and disappears.

* * * * *

"I was going to beg an invitation if I did not receive it," says Harriet, a week later, as she returns my kiss of welcome. "I was growing very uneasy about you. But," tapping my cheek, "I might have spared myself any worry on the subject of your health, as you are looking provokingly well."

Bébé declares I have caused them all more trouble than I am worth, whereupon I take her in custody, and march her upstairs, and run her into her bedroom.

Just before dinner, Chandos arrives, having been driven over from a country house some miles distant, where he has been staying.

Bébé greets him with a light laugh that has nothing in it of nervousness, or suppressed pleasure. It is purely indifferent. For the moment I feel puzzled, and disappointed.

"Strangemore seems to be our established meeting ground after long absences," she says, giving him her hand. "Let me congratulate you on having escaped cholera and lawless tribes in the East."

"I have only been a week in England since my

return," replies he, ceremoniously, "and have been kept pretty busy all that time, or I would have allowed myself the pleasure of calling upon you and Mrs. Beatoun. I did not know you were again staying with Lady Handcock."

"Oh, Harriet cannot do without me now," says Bébé, with a little saucy glance at Harry, who smiles and shakes her head. "She finds me invaluable."

"How infinitely obliged your mother must be to Lady Handcock," says Chandos, mischievously.

"For taking me off her hands? Ah! see what comes of associating with barbarians," retorts Bébé, with a shrug.

Yet with all their badinage and apparent unconcern, I can perceive an undercurrent of constraint between these two. During all the first week, this forced gaiety and determined forgetfulness of the sweet and bitter past continues—and then it falls away. Silence and avoidance take their place, and in Chandos especially I notice a distinct avoidance of all converse bordering on a *tête-à-tête*.

I am beginning to despair of any good result arising from this second bringing together of them in my house, when one evening shortly before the termination of their visit, a something, a mere trifle occurs, that is yet sufficient to alter the tenor of more lives than one.

It is the 27th of August. Dinner is at an end,

and tired of strolling in the grounds and gardens—so softly perfumed by the night flowers—we three women pass into the lighted drawing-room, while Marmaduke and Chandos linger outside on the balcony to finish their cigars.

I let my fingers wander idly over the piano, and now and again hum softly some old air, or ballad.

"Bébé, sing something for us to-night," I say, coaxingly, rising from the piano-stool. She is not fond of letting us hear her perfectly beautiful voice. "Anything you like yourself, only sing."

"Don't ask me," she objects, languidly. "It is so long since I have sung that I scarcely know any song correctly. Harriet will tell you, I rarely, if ever, touch the piano."

"But you must," I persist, "break down if you will, only let me hear your voice. Remember there are no ungenerous critics here, and nobody's singing pleases me so much as yours."

"Do, Miss Beatoun," says someone.

It is Chandos. He and Marmaduke have come in through the open window, and are now standing in its embrasure, framed in by the hanging curtains on either side.

The tone of his voice strikes me as being odd. He is looking eagerly, fixedly, at her; will she refuse this sudden unexpected request of his? Coming after his late coldness it surprises even me.

Bébé raises to his a face, smiling, but pale.

"Well, yes, I will sing you something," she says, and taking my place, strikes a few lingering chords.

"I have no music with me," she continues, with her face turned from us, "so you must be satisfied with whatever comes first to me." Then she begins—

Along the grass sweet airs are blown
  Our way, this day in spring;
Of all the songs that we have known,
  Now which one shall we sing?
Not that, my love, ah! no;
Not this? my love? why so?
Yet both were ours, but hours will come and go.

The branches cross above our eyes,
  The skies are in a net,
And what's the thing beneath the skies
  We two would most forget?
Not birth, my love, no, no,
Not death, my love, no, no,
The love once ours, but ours long hours ago.

As she comes to the last line, a curious wild sadness that is almost despair, mingles with the petulant defiance that has hitherto characterised her tone. And the music? where has she got it? So weird, so pathetic, so full of passionate recklessness.

When she has finished we are silent. I feel horribly inclined to cry, yet scarcely know why; and am certain Marmaduke's eyes are fastened upon me.

Somebody says "Thank you," and then we all follow suit. Chandos alone is silent.

"Why will you sing sad songs, Bébé?" exclaims Duke, rather impatiently; and Bébé laughs—

"I suppose because I am such a dismal animal myself," she replies, lightly, and rising, comes over to me.

The moonlight streams across the carpet, rebuking the soft radiance of the lamps. A hush has fallen upon us. Her song's refrain almost repeats itself aloud through the stillness. Two tears fall quietly upon my clasped hands. "The love *once* ours—"

Pushing the curtain aside with one hand, Chandos says in a low determined tone—

"Will you come and see how the gardens look by moonlight?"

He addresses no one, he mentions no name, but his eyes are fixed on Bébé; he has forgotten all, everything but her. Putting my own thoughts from me, I listen with breathless eagerness for her answer. Well do I know it is the third and last appeal. Should she reject this, she will indeed lose for ever the heart that truly loves her. At length she speaks—

"Yes, if you wish it," she says, letting the words fall from her with singular sweetness.

She joins him, and together they go out on the balcony, down the steps, and so disappear.

"I am so rejoiced," exclaims Harriet, plaintively, when they are well out of hearing. "Now, I do hope they will marry each other, and bring their

little comedy to a successful close. I am sure we must all confess it has had a sufficiently long run."

* * * * *

"Yes, I sang it on purpose. I don't mind acknowledging it to you," cries Bébé, hours afterwards, flinging her arms round my neck, and hiding her face out of sight. "And was it not well I did—was it not well? Oh Phyllis! though I sang it so bravely, there was a terrible fear at my heart all the time. I wished him to know, and yet I dreaded his knowing. Can you understand? I dreaded his guessing my motive too clearly, and yet it was my last chance."

"Dearest, I am so glad."

"Ah! what tortures I have endured this past fortnight. I felt convinced he no longer cared for me; and I knew I could not be happy without him. But he does love me—more than ever, he says—and now I shall have him always." She pauses to indulge in a little rapturous sob. "Phyllis, never mistake obstinacy for pride!"

Harriet and I agree in thinking them the most charming of lovers. Indeed, as an engaged pair, they are a pattern to all others similarly afflicted. They never glower at us when we enter the room unexpectedly, and they don't blush. They get rid of all the inevitable spooning by going for long walks together, where no one can witness, or be distressed by their absurd appreciation of each other's

society. And they actually refrain from making eyes at one another across the dining-table. When I say that they manage to keep themselves alive to the fact that there are other people in the world besides themselves, I consider I have spoken volumes in their favour, and have done them every justice.

When they leave at the end of the week, I positively miss them, and wish them back again; but as the wedding is to take place almost immediately, further delay in the country is impossible.

Marmaduke and I fall once more into our old ways, seeing as little as may be of each other.

Although I will not confess it even to myself, I am sick at heart. With the return of my good health has come back my old horror of loneliness, and the girlish longing for some one to sympathise with me in all the pleasures and troubles of my daily life. Not even the frequent visits of mother, and Dora—who with her husband is staying at Summerleas—can make up to me for what I believe I have lost.

When it is too late, I learn how precious a thing I have cast away. By my own capricious folly, and through wilful temper, I have for ever alienated Duke's affection. Very rarely does he speak to me; still more rarely of his own accord does he seek my presence. I no longer afford him any joy. It is only too apparent that he has ceased to care for me.

Full of such thoughts and misgivings I one day

creep upstairs to the little turret chamber, where—while still Phyllis Vernon—I once stood with Marmaduke to gaze down upon the crowded parterre beneath. In another tiny apartment opening off this, is a deeply cushioned window, in which it is my usual practice to sit and read such works as serve to distract my mind from the vague regrets that now for ever haunt it.

I have at length brought myself to feel some interest in the hero of my tale, when approaching voices warn me that foes to my solitude draw near. Not wishing to be disturbed, I move still further back into my window, I pull the curtains across me, so that no one in the adjoining room could by any chance see me.

I can distinguish George Ashurst's jerky tones, and then Marmaduke's distinct, though low. There seems to me something argumentative in their discourse, and the footsteps come slowly, as though every now and then they stood to dispute a point.

Suddenly my own name is mentioned, and putting down my book, I wait to hear what will follow.

Of course I know perfectly well in my own mind that I ought to rise at once, and honourably declare myself, but equally well in my own mind that I will do no such thing. What can Duke be saying about me? As they enter the turret his words ring out plain and stern.

"I tell you, Ashurst, I can stand the life I am

leading no longer. You cannot understand what it is to see the woman you love—to see your wife, treat you as the very commonest stranger. Good feeling alone, I honestly believe, prevents her from showing me absolute hatred."

"Pooh! my dear fellow," says George. "I don't believe a word of it. She is too kind a little soul to hate anyone; and you, least of all. Of course the whole thing you know, was unfortunate, you know, and that, but it will all come right in the end."

"I daresay. When I am in my grave," says Marmaduke, bitterly. "You are a good fellow, George, but you can't know everything, and I am not to be persuaded in this matter. She was right; I should never have insisted on that second marriage; it has only made her life more miserable, and placed a fretting chain around her neck. But indeed I meant it for the best."

"What else could you have done, you know," interposes kindly George.

I have gained my feet, and am standing, trembling with hope and fear, in my hiding-place—my hand grasping the sheltering curtain for protection and support. At this moment, I no longer deceive myself, by my passionate eagerness to hear what more Duke may say, I know that all my heart is his. And he loves me! Oh, the relief—the almost painful rapture, this certainty causes me—hush! he speaks again.

"I shall torment her no longer with my presence. I have delayed here too long already, but I hoped recovered health, and the old associations, might give her a kindlier feeling towards me. Now I feel convinced she never loved me. Let her live her life in peace. She will grow gay and bright, and like the child Phyllis I first knew, when she feels sure she has seen the last of me."

"Well, well, well," says George, "I suppose there is no use in anyone's speaking; but to me it is incomprehensible; why she cannot be content and happy in this charming place, with the best fellow in the world for her husband, is more than I can fathom. But it seems to me now, Carrington, really, you know, —that *you* very seldom speak to *her;* eh?"

(Good George—dear George.) "Why should I put myself in the way of a cold reply? I detest forcing myself upon anyone—and when she is by her own avowal happier when absent from me. Bah! let us forget the subject—to me it is a hateful one."

"Then why on earth when you knew all this beforehand, did you insist on marrying her again?"

"Because there was nothing else to be done. Better to bear a name distasteful to her, than to bear none at all. I did it for her sake."

"Then do you mean me to understand that you yourself had no interest in the matter?"

There is a pause—a long one—and my heart actually stops beating; at length—

"Do not think that," says Duke, in a low tone. "The love I felt for her on our first wedding morning is, if possible, deeper and truer now. Though at times my chains gall and almost madden me, yet I would not exchange them for fetters soft as down. At least she is mine; insomuch as that no other man can claim her. And I have this poor consolation in my loneliness, that though she does not love *me*, she at all events cares for no one else."

"Poor little Phyllis," murmurs George Ashurst, tenderly.

"You are a happy man, George," says Duke, adopting a lighter tone, "do not let my troubles depress you."

"Yes; Dora is a perfect wife," declares my brother-in-law, with honest content; "good-bye, Carrington, I will come over about that house either to-night or to-morrow morning early."

"Better come to-night and sleep," urges Duke, and George, half consenting, goes noisily down the stairs.

When he has been gone at least five minutes, I steal from my concealment, and entering the turret chamber, walk softly towards Marmaduke, who is standing with his back turned to me, gazing down through the window upon the lawn beneath. His attitude betokens deep thought. I go lightly to his side, and let my eyes follow the direction his have taken.

"Dreaming, Duke?" I ask, gaily.

He starts violently as I wake him from his reverie, and betrays astonishment not only at my presence at this moment, but also at my altered demeanour.

"Almost, I think," he says, after a moment's hesitation. It is so long since I have addressed him with anything approaching to *bonhomie*.

"How short the evenings are getting," I go on, peering out into the dusk. "Marmaduke, do you remember the large party you had in these gardens before we were married?"

"Yes."

"And how we two stood just here, and looked down upon them?"

"I remember well." He is evidently intensely puzzled by my manner, which is cordial to the last degree.

"How long ago it seems now, does it not?"

"Very long."

I am not progressing—I feel this, and pause for a moment.

"You are dressed for dinner," I remark, presently, "so early?"

"Not so very early—it is half-past six."

"Indeed! how the time has flown. Well, let me add this to your appearance to make you perfect." I detach a little red rose-bud from the bosom of my dress, and place it with lingering carefulness in his coat. I believe as I do so, he imagines I have

developed the crowning phase of my malady, by going mad. "Duke," with perfect unconcern, and with my head a little on one side to mark the effect made by my rose—"Duke, don't you think it is time now I should give up my invalid habits, and learn to change my dress every evening like a civilised being?"

"I think you would be very foolish, Phyllis, to try any changes just yet."

"But don't you think me much better and stronger in every way?"

"Very much better. Your face has gained its old colour, and your arms have regained the pretty soft roundness they had when you were—that is—before we married."

I pull up the loose sleeve of my dress and look with some satisfaction upon the "pretty soft roundness." My old weakness for compliments is strong upon me.

"Why did you not finish your sentence," I ask, slyly; "you were going to say when I was a *girl*."

"Because you look such a girl still—such a mere child, indeed—that I thought it would sound absurd."

"I am glad of that. I would wish to be young and fresh always."

"There was a time," with a faint smile, "when you longed with equal vigour to be old, and worldly-wise."

"Ah, yes—what a goose I was then. But really though, I am growing horribly fat. My hands even, see how plump they are."

I lay five slight little fingers in his, confidingly; I can see how he reddens at my touch. He holds them softly, and turns them over to see the pink palm at the other side, and then turns them back again, but he does not speak—very slowly, but with determination, he lets them go.

"No fear of my wedding-ring coming off now," I say, cheerfully, though somewhat disconcerted at the failure of my last little ruse; "not even when I wash my hands, does it stir. I won't be able to get rid of it in a hurry."

"That seems rather a pity, does it not?" remarks he, bitterly.

"A pity? Why? I would never forgive myself if I lost it."

"Would you have nothing in the past altered, Phyllis?" he asks, suddenly, and curiously, turning for the first time to confront me.

"Some things—yes. But not my wedding-ring, certainly."

"Good little Phyllis," murmurs he, somewhat sadly; "your recovered health has restored to you your good-nature."

"It was not good-nature," I protest, eagerly, feeling strangely inclined to cry. "I said it, because I meant it. But come," hastily, fearing I have said

too much, "dinner must be ready, we had better go downstairs."

Marmaduke leaves the window, and moves towards the door, allowing me to follow.

"Have you forgotten your manners," I cry, playfully, "will you not conduct me downstairs? Give me your arm, Duke."

"Your spirits are very high to-night—are they not?" he says, smiling. "I am glad to see you so like your old self, as now I can with a clearer conscience leave home."

"Are you leaving?"

"Yes. You know I promised myself to go abroad in the autumn. I will arrange with Billy, or your mother, to stay with you while I am away."

"If you are going, well and good," I return, quietly, "but do not arrange matters for me. I will have no one to stay with me in your absence."

"What! not even Billy?"

"Not even Billy," I say, firmly.

* * * * *

We get through dinner almost without a comment. My sudden overflow of geniality has entirely forsaken me. I am as mute, as depressed, as in those first days at Hazleton.

Rising from the table as soon as custom will permit me, I make my way to the drawing room, where I sit in moody discontent.

I am wretched—most miserable; doubly so in that I can see no plan of escape from my troubles

lying clear before me. I rest my aching head on my hands and try to think; but always his saddened face, and averted eyes, are to be seen. We are so close—yet so divided. Only a wall or two, a door, a passage, but miles might be said to separate us—so far apart are we in sympathy. At this moment I know he is sitting in the library, silent, companionless.

And then a great desire rises within me. Throwing aside my book, with nervous determination, I walk down the drawing room, through the door, across the hall, never pausing until I find myself before the library door.

I knock hurriedly, lest by any chance my ebbing courage should entirely evaporate; and my heart almost dies within me, as the well-known voice calls out "come in."

I open, and advance a few steps into the room. A slight fire is burning in the grate—it is the beginning of September, and already the evenings show symptoms of coming cold — Marmaduke is seated at the table, busily engaged, with writing materials all around him.

"What is it, Phyllis?" he asks, expectantly, the pen still in his hand.

"Oh! nothing," I return, awkwardly, failing miserably as I come to the point; "nothing to signify; another time will do. You are busy now. What are you writing, Duke?"

"I was drawing out my will," he replies, smiling. "I thought it better to do so, before leaving home

for—for an indefinite time. No one knows what may happen. I am glad you have come in just now, as you may as well hear what I have written, and see if you wish anything altered. Now listen."

"I will not," I cry, petulantly. "I hate wills and testaments, and all that kind of thing. I won't listen to a word of it; and—and I hope with all my heart *I* shall die before you."

"My dear Phyllis!" Then quickly, "You are excited, you have something on your mind—what did you come to me for just now, Phyllis—tell me."

Now, or never. I am conscious of a chill feeling at my heart, but I close one hand over the other tightly, and thus supported, go on bravely.

"Yes, I did come to tell you something. That —that I love you. And—oh, Duke—if you leave me again, you will kill me."

Here I burst into a perfect passion of weeping, and cover my face with my hands.

There is not a movement in the room, not a sound, except my heavy bursting sobs. Then someone puts an arm round me, and presses my head down upon his breast. I look up into Marmaduke's face. He is white as death; and though he is evidently putting a terrible restraint upon himself, I can see that his lips, beneath his fair moustache, are trembling.

"You are tired, Phyllis, over-fatigued," he says, soothingly. "Lie still, here; and you will be better presently."

"It is not that," I cry, passionately, "not that at all. Oh, Marmaduke! hear me now—do not punish me for my past coldness. I love you with all my heart; try to believe me."

"I cannot," he whispers, huskily. "I have been too long living in the other belief. To hope again, only to be again cast down, would be my death. I do not dare imagine it possible you love me."

"But I do, I do," I sob piteously, flinging my arms around his neck. "I always, always liked you better than anyone else, but during these past few months I have learned to love you so well, that I cannot be happy without you. When I heard you say this evening, you intended leaving me again, I thought my heart would have broken."

Turning up my face so that the full glare of the lamp falls upon it, Marmaduke gazes at me as though he would read the innermost workings of my heart.

"Is this the truth?" he asks. "Are you sure you are not deceiving yourself and me?"

"Must I say it again? Can you not see by me how it is?" I answer, still crying; I am a perfect Niobe by this time, and am dismally conscious that the top of my nose is degenerating into a warm pink. "I am sure I'm unhappy enough for anything."

Not noticing the rather ungracious tendency of this latter remark, Duke draws me closer to him, and, stooping his head, presses his cheek to my wet one.

"My love, my life," he whispers, and holds me as though he never meant again to let me go.

We are quite silent for a few minutes—during which a great content, such as I have never before known, creeps into my heart. Then Duke, with a long happy sigh, partly releases me. His eyelashes I can see are wet with tears, but there is the very sweetest and tenderest smile upon his lips.

"I have not waited in vain," he says. "At last I can call you mine. At last; and just when I had given up all hope—darling—darling!"

* * * * *

It is half-an-hour later and we are now thoroughly comfortable—full of rest and quiet joy.

We are sitting before the library fire; I on a low stool, with my head leaning against Duke's knee, he, with one hand round my neck, while with the other he every now and then ruffles, or, as he fondly believes, smooths, my "nut-brown locks." For the last three or four minutes no words have passed between us. I think we are too happy to give way to the mere expression of our feelings.

Suddenly, all in one moment as it seems to us, without any warning, we hear a loud voice outside the door, a heavy footstep, a rapid turning of the handle, and George Ashurst is in the room.

I make one desperate effort to rise, and recover the dignity my attitude has destroyed, but Duke, with a strong detaining grasp, prevents me. I get only as far as my knees, and from that position glare at my brother-in-law, as though I would willingly devour him.

"I took your offer of a bed after all," he is beginning, when something in the situation strikes him as odd. He meets my eyes, and breaks down. "Oh, ah! I had no idea—I didn't know, you know." He stops, hopelessly, looking as ludicrously silly and puzzled as even I could wish him.

"Neither did I," declares Marmaduke, with a laugh, "until half-an hour ago. But it is all right, Ashurst, we have made it up, and when I do go abroad, I will take my wife with me."

"Didn't I tell you all along how it was," cries George, enthusiastically (he had not; but by a superhuman effort I refrain from contradicting him); "I declare to you," says he, subsiding into a chair, "I was never so glad of anything in all my life before."

There is a minute's pause. Then Duke, turning, lays a light caressing touch upon my shoulder as I kneel beside him. He speaks in a very low tone.

"We are all very glad, I think—and thankful," he says, with the softest, tenderest smile.

* * * * *

All was ended now, the hope, and the fear, and the sorrow;
All the aching of heart, the restless, unsatisfied longing;
All the dull, deep pain, and constant anguish of patience!

THE END.

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